

**The London School of Economics and  
Political Science**

*Between ‘Umma, Empire and Nation: The Role of the  
‘Ulama in the ‘Urabi Revolt and the Emergence of  
Egyptian Nationalism*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes to an ongoing debate on the nature of Islam's role in the emergence of nationalism in the Muslim world in general, and in Egypt in the years 1879-1882. While theories of nations and nationalism reveal a contested theoretical landscape, many scholars agree that Islam and nationalism are antithetical and expound divergent conceptions of community. For their part, Middle East scholars, view the 'Urabi Revolt 1879-1882, as a 'protonationalist' precursor to the 'full-blown' Egyptian nationalism of the early twentieth century. Finally, 'ulama participation in the 'Urabi Revolt has been mainly ignored, most likely due to the dominant narrative – increasingly challenged – that 'ulama were, to a great extent, marginalized over the nineteenth century in Egypt due to reforms that challenged their spheres of influence.

On the theoretic tension between Islam and nationalism and in asserting the nationalism of the 'Urabi Revolt, I explore the case of Egypt, the 'Urabi Revolt itself and the role of Islamic clerics, thinkers and activists. These key actors put forward convincing views of how Islamic and nationalist notions of community were in fact reconcilable. Furthermore, I argue that Egypt represents an exception to the dominant scholarly view that sees many nationalisms of the Middle East emerging in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat of 1918.

I offer an alternative account of the 'ulama's fate during the nineteenth century and explore their role in the 'Urabi Revolt. While reforms did reduce the 'ulama's wealth, economic privileges and political influence this did not, I argue, result in complete marginality because 'ulama monopoly of the religious and educational sphere remained largely unchallenged. Legal reforms may have displaced 'ulama from key positions but these were not as comprehensive as some scholars have suggested.

In the emerging nationalism of 1879 – 1882 and the British invasion, I argue that 'ulama played a prominent role, both in the intellectual articulation of nationalism and within the political and revolutionary events. 'Ulama both defined and were active participants in the nationalist movement's relationship to contending political forces including the Ottoman Empire, the local Khedive and indeed the invading British forces, imbuing Egyptian nationalism with a distinct Islamic character.

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### **Note on Transliteration**

In this thesis, all Arabic words and terms appear in English transliteration.

Arabic words used frequently throughout this thesis, like ‘ulama, ‘umma, ‘Urabi, Sheikh, Shari’a and Quran will appear in normal standard text. Less frequently used Arabic words like *fellahin*, *Majlis*, *katatib*, *madrassa* will be *italicized*.

The ‘ is used to show the Arabic letter “ain”. No symbol is used for the Arabic letter “hamza”. Likewise no subscripts or superscripts are used in this thesis.

## Glossary of Arabic Terms

<i>al-‘adl</i>	justice
‘alim (sing.) ‘ulama (pl.)	Islamic religious scholar/s
<i>Ameer al Mo ‘minoun</i>	Commander of the Faithful
Caliph	Leader of the Muslim community
<i>dar al-Harb</i>	abode of war
<i>dar al-Islam</i>	abode of Islam
<i>Diwan</i>	Administrative Council
<i>Diwan al-Wali</i>	Governing Councils
Faqih (sing.); Fuqahah (pl.)	Jurists
<i>fara ‘id al-mirath</i>	inheritance laws
fatwa (sing.); fatawa (pl.)	Islamic legal opinion or ruling
<i>fellah (sing.); fellahin (pl.)</i>	peasant/s
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
Hadith	narratives of the Prophet Muhammad’s traditions
Hanbali	Islamic school of legal thought ( <i>madhhab</i> ) whose origins are attributed to Ahmed ibn Hanbal in ninth-century Baghdad.
<i>Hajj</i>	religious pilgrimage
<i>halqa</i>	circle of students
Hanafi	one of the four main doctrinal schools of Islamic law founded by ‘Abu Hanifa (d.765)
<i>al-hukuma</i>	Government
<i>hubb al-watan</i>	love of country
<i>al-hurriya</i>	liberty/freedom
‘ilm	knowledge



<i>iltizam</i>	tax farm system
Imam	leader of the prayers
<i>ijaza</i>	permission to teach at Al-Azhar
<i>ijtihad</i>	independent reason
<i>istifta</i>	question or request for fatwa
<i>jahiliyya</i>	backwardness/ignorance
jihad	the Arabic verb ‘to struggle’
<i>jins/jinsiyya</i>	citizen/citizenship
<i>kuttab (sing.); katatib (pl.)</i>	religious elementary/primary school/s
Khatib	sermon giver
<i>Khedive</i>	Viceroy, equivalent to a local ruling monarch
<i>la’iha al-Wataniyya</i>	National Declaration or Manifesto
<i>madhhab (sing.); madhaahib (pl.)</i>	School/s of Islamic legal interpretation
<i>madrassa (sing.); madaaris (pl.)</i>	school
<i>Majlis al-Ahkam</i>	Judicial Council
<i>Majlis Shura al-Nuwwab</i>	Consultative Assembly or Council of Deputies
Maliki	school of law attributed to Malik ibn Anas in the eighth century
Mufti	Islamic legal experts (givers of legal opinion)
<i>multazim</i>	tax farmers
<i>Naqib al-Ashraf</i>	Marshal of the Notables
<i>al-Thawra al-‘Urabiyya</i>	the Urabi Revolt
Qadi (sing.); Quda (pl.)	judge/s
<i>qadi ‘askar</i>	chief judge
<i>Rashidun</i> Caliphs	Rightly Guided Caliphs. The Prophet Muhammad’s first four immediate successors in Islam (AD 632–661)
<i>riwaq</i>	Dormitory

Shafi'i	one of the four main doctrinal schools of Islamic law founded by Muhammed ibn Shafi'i
<i>Shahaadah</i>	Declaration of Islamic faith
Shari'a	Islamic law
Sheikh al-Balad	village headman
Sunna	actions and deeds of the Prophet Muhammed
<i>taqlid</i>	imitation-based learning
<i>tasawwuf</i>	Mysticism
<i>tawhid</i>	Theology
<i>al-tarbiya</i>	upbringing/education
'umma	the universal Islamic community of believers
<i>usul al-fiqh</i>	fundamental principles of jurisprudence
Vali	Governor
Wahhabism	Orthodox Sunni ideology following the teachings of the eighteenth-century orthodox Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab
<i>al-watan</i>	homeland/nation
<i>Wataniyya</i>	nationhood
<i>waqf (sing.); awqaf (pl)</i>	charitable endowment/s
<i>al-zulm</i>	injustice

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**Chapter One**  
**Islam and Nationalism: The Role of Islam and the ‘Ulama in the**  
**‘Urabi Revolt 1879-1882**

**The Theoretical Tension: Islam and Nationalism**

Even a superficial glance at contemporary current affairs shows the importance of Islam and nationalism to understanding many of the political struggles around the world today. For its part, nationalism continues to ignite political conflict and fierce political debate in every continent while Islam, according to Ernest Gellner writing in 1979, the year of the Iranian Revolution, “has clearly the greatest political potential; potential for mobilisation and simultaneously for underwriting a social order, legitimising both socially radical and socially conservative regimes and establishments.”<sup>1</sup> But for all the importance that can be attributed to these two powerful political forces and for all the explanatory literature that this importance has spawned, our understanding of how these two powerful political forces often converge and how they shape and influence these political movements remains an important area of research.

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of theoretical and historiographical research both on Islam and on nationalism. Theoretical research has greatly furthered our understanding of the emergence of nations and nationalism while studies of Islamic societies have allowed greater insights into the ways in which these societies function and more importantly, the role of Islam and of religion within Muslim society. This thesis arises out of the contention that the divide between the growing body of theoretical work explaining the rise of nations and nationalism and historiographical accounts and empirical studies of the emergence of particular ‘nations’ and nationalisms in the Islamic world remains wide and inadequately covered.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Gellner, ‘State and Revolution in Islam’, *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 8:3, December 1979, p.188.

Theories seeking to explain the rise of nations and nationalism have evolved and developed significantly since the 1960s advancing the field in new directions. From here, four main theoretical approaches have emerged within nationalism studies giving rise to a substantial body of theoretical literature detailing the four main approaches which are the “modernist”, “ethno-symbolist”, “primordialist” and “perennialist” theories of the rise of nations and nationalism. By far the most popular and indeed persuasive are the modernist and ethno-symbolist approaches (see chapter 2) although as Fred Halliday observes, many of the rhetorical arguments used to legitimise the Turkish nation, the Jewish nation or the Arab nation often rely on perennialist theories which maintain that nations have in fact “always existed, or at least for what is an (undefinedly) sufficient length of time.”<sup>2</sup> But, despite an ever-growing body of theory surrounding nations and nationalism, there remain very few works of a theoretical nature that focus their analysis on the relationship between Islam and nationalism and the impact that Islam has had on the emergence of nations and nationalism across the Islamic world. This represents a significant deficit in the overall theoretical understanding of nations and nationalism which this thesis will make a contribution towards addressing.

As the nation-state has become the most dominant unit of political status, Islamic communities around the world have resolutely embraced the ideology of nationalism. If this is the case, where does this leave the ‘umma, the universal Islamic community for all Muslims regardless of nationality, with a single Caliph at its head as the ‘Commander of the Faithful’ and supreme head, which was abolished by Mustapha Kemal ‘Attaturk’ with the emergence of the modern Turkish Republic in 1922. It is clear that efforts to rejuvenate the Islamic ‘umma as a supra-national political unit have lost any meaningful impetus and are confined to a tiny minority of Islamists – mainly of a radical leaning – around the world who call for a return to the Caliphate and the

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism: Initial Reflections*, in James Jankowski & Israel Gershoni (eds) *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p27.

re-establishment of the 'umma. In the trial that led to the execution of Sayid Qutb, the modern ideologue of radical Islam, he declared:

*I believe that the bonds of ideology and belief are more sturdy than those of patriotism based upon region and that this false distinction among Muslims on a regional basis is but one consequence of crusading and Zionist imperialism which must be eradicated.*<sup>3</sup>

The re-emergence of the 'umma as a political unit with a single Caliph at its head may be a distant prospect today but how has it been possible for the overwhelming majority of Muslims to abandon the idea of the 'umma – an idea that is one of the central tenets of Islam – and pursue a type of community – the nation – that seems to be at odds with the type of community prescribed by Islam? My argument begins in the theoretical realm of nations and nationalism, where I suggest that our understanding of the emergence of nations and nationalism in the Muslim world is based largely on a narrow comprehension of the concept of the Islamic 'umma and its perceived universalising effects. This has led many scholars of nationalism, to unnecessarily limit the scope of their theoretical analyses overlooking key characteristics of the 'umma where similarities exist with the conceptual basis of the nation. In this way, theorists have largely failed to examine adequately, specific cases of nationalisms from the Islamic world where Muslim nationalists often appeal to popular national sentiment and inject these appeals with Islamic meanings, memories and signifiers reconciling the nation with the 'umma by articulating the centrality of Islam to national identity and the national community.

In the conceptual minefield of definitions of nations and nationalism, it is important to make clear from the outset, the definition I adopt in this thesis is one proposed by Anthony Smith, which, in the complex and multi-layered scholarly debates on nations and nationalism, combines a sufficiently broad platform with adequate scope in looking at the importance of history to the nation.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., quoted from, Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, London, Faber, 1982, p.271.

Smith defines the nation as:

*a named human population occupying a historic territory or homeland and sharing common myths and memories; a mass, public culture; a single economy; and common rights and duties for all members.*<sup>4</sup>

I will further use his definition of nationalism as:

*an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential "nation".*<sup>5</sup>

With the exception of Anthony Smith, Ernest Gellner and John Armstrong, scholars of nationalism have paid little attention to the Arab Middle East and in particular to the increasing number of historiographical accounts and works on specific nationalisms in the Islamic world. Most theories of nationalism take the view that Islam and nationalism advance very different – in fact diametrically opposed – notions of community. On the one hand, nations are at their heart communities based on particular features that assert common elements of identity albeit based on a broad range of 'national' markers. Of course, different nations will highlight some or all of these traits but essentially, nations are an assertion of the uniqueness of a group of people sharing some or all of these particularistic features, which define the nation by creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

The theoretical argument continues that in the Islamic tradition, none of these boundaries are recognised as the legitimate basis of community. In stark contrast to the particularistic features of the nation, Islam puts forward the idea of the 'umma, a universal community that transcends bonds of nationhood and places belief in Islam, its teachings and principles as the single and primary basis of the 'umma.<sup>6</sup> This is not

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, p.3. See also Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London, Penguin Books, 1991, p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965, p.3. Rosenthal's and indeed most other definitions of the 'umma point towards it being the "universal Islamic community of believers". The concept and institution of the 'umma originates from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the "original 'umma of Medina"; after Muhammad's death,



to say that people within the 'umma do not possess particular features of nationhood as broadly outlined above. The 'umma has, throughout history spanned a vast geographical area and within this there exists a heterogeneous mix of languages, cultures, ethnic groups and homeland attachments. But, the bond of belief and adherence to Islam, relegates these 'national' features to being mere examples of the diversity out of which Islam, with its universalistic principles of belief and 'brotherhood', shapes and defines the community of believers.<sup>7</sup>

Given the limited debate among theorists of nations and nationalism of Islam's role and compatibility with the nation, the first aim of this thesis is to make a contribution in this respect. To do this, I analyse the emergence of nationalism in Egypt during the late nineteenth century and in particular, the writings of four popular Egyptian-Islamic pro-nationalist thinkers of the nineteenth century to assess their views and opinions on nations and nationalism. The analysis shows first, the importance of these thinkers to the theoretical debates on Islam's relationship with nationalism because their work shows many of the salient features of the nation being present within conceptions of the 'umma – specifically, the role of language, territory, a unique and continuous history and shared myths and memories. The importance of these thinkers is also evident in situating the wider intellectual debates about the rise of nationalism in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, which these scholars were a central part of. They were some of the first Islamic thinkers in the age of nationalism to articulate the utility of nationalism to national progress while at the same time, showing how nation and 'umma could coexist at a time when Egypt remained a part of the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic 'umma. When these thinkers talked of and debated nationalism, a political idea and ideal that they were all drawn to, they had to do so in terms that spoke to and appealed to their mainly Muslim constituents who they were aware remained deeply attached to the Ottoman Sultan and the idea of the Muslim 'umma. The views they put forward on nationalism and Islam suggest that they saw very little tension between

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Caliphs led the 'umma and were seen as "spiritual as well as temporal rulers". See also pp. ix–xx and pp. 3–11.

<sup>7</sup> Sami Zubaida, 'Islam and Nationalism: Continuities and Contradictions', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10:4, 2004, p.407.

the two concepts. On the contrary, these thinkers saw the nation as a vehicle for greater Islamic unity which in the end would contribute to strengthening the 'umma.

But if theories of nations and nationalism have failed in large part to keep pace and draw on the wealth of historiographical and empirical studies of nationalism around the Islamic world and Arab Middle East, the same can also be said of historiographical accounts of the Arab Middle East. Fred Halliday once again observes that if the theoretical dimensions of nationalism have advanced in relation to the recognised importance of the phenomenon, “much of the writing on specific nationalisms, and hence on “nations”, has remained innocent of it.”<sup>8</sup> Halliday made this statement when writing on Yemeni nationalism but it is evident in much of the writing by scholars of the Middle East. The limited use of theories of nationalism against which to test the empirical evidence in the analyses of regional nationalisms and the absence of empirical case studies in theoretical works was observed by Paul Lalor in a review article where he argued that “the new writing on nationalism has largely ignored the Arab Middle East”<sup>9</sup> and he continued that “area studies scholars working on Arab nationalism have been slow to make use of the new [theoretical] material,”<sup>10</sup> although he also observed that this was changing.

I do not argue in this thesis that scholars of the Middle East and the Islamic world have not explored the rise of nationalisms and the role of Islam in these movements. Neither do I argue that these scholars have ignored Islam's role or have not ascribed sufficient importance to it when exploring the rise of nationalism. Rather, this thesis attempts to engage with theoretical perspectives of nations and nationalism while at the same time grounding this in a particular case study – namely the emergence of nationalism in Egypt in the late nineteenth century and in particular, the events and experiences in Egypt in the years 1879–1882.

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<sup>8</sup> Halliday, op. cit. *The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism*, p26.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Lalor, 'Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol 5:2, 1999, p303

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p303

During this short period, a native nationalist movement emerged to limit the dominance of the local Turco-Circassian elite, restrict European penetration in Egypt, dispel the imperial intentions of a British invasion, and reject the power and authority of the Khedive (Viceroy, equivalent to a local ruling monarch) through opposition and later an attempt to depose him from rule. Furthermore, Egypt was also nominally part of the Ottoman Empire with the Ottoman Sultan the *de facto* Caliph and head of the Islamic 'umma. The nationalist movement drew a distinction between Egypt's Islamic ties and loyalty to the 'umma and the Ottoman Sultan on the one hand, and political independence on the other. With the help of the pro-nationalist Islamic intellectual elite, the nationalist movement sought to further distance Egypt from the political and legal authority of the Ottoman Empire and institute greater political independence, while at the same time, seeking to assert and indeed strengthen its religious ties and status as part of the 'umma with the Ottoman Sultan at its head.

Egypt first expressed nationalist tendencies in the late nineteenth century before any other majority national group within the Ottoman Empire. While there was undoubtedly unrest in many parts of the Empire throughout the nineteenth century, Egypt was the first overwhelmingly Islamic territory to express a desire to be politically independent from the Ottoman Empire. The timing of Egypt's nationalist expression in the years 1879-1882 sets Egypt aside from other later nationalisms around the Muslim world because it was an attempt to gain political independence from an Islamic ruler – the Ottoman Sultan – during the lifetime of the Empire and not in the aftermath of its collapse.<sup>11</sup> From the 1860s and 1870s, a new educated Egyptian elite emerged which gave rise to and was responsible for stimulating nationalist sentiment during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. This period was also accompanied by greater strains on Egypt's economy through its mounting foreign debt, the establishment of new emerging political institutions and strained relationships with both the Ottoman Empire and the European powers. Most scholars of Egyptian nationalism agree that this period resulted in the emergence of a local oppositional movement lead by the Egyptian Colonel Ahmed 'Urabi which challenged the local

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob M. Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, Tel Aviv, Israel Publishing House, 1953, p.1.

ruling elite and the role of the European powers in Egypt. But interestingly, scholars stop short of attributing these events and this period as one where 'full-blown' nationalism was evident in Egypt, seeing it instead as an early embryonic phase of nationalism where national sentiment and a distinct national consciousness was in its infancy and formative process.

For Albert Hourani, Islam's contribution to Egyptian nationalism is clear but in its nineteenth century stage, the relationship between the two was, he argues, complicated as "the idea of the Egyptian nation, entitled to a separate political existence, involved not only the denial of a single Islamic political community, but also the assertion that there could be a virtuous community based on something other than a common religion and a revealed law."<sup>12</sup> Other formidable scholars of Egypt including Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski begin their analysis of Egyptian nationalism from the beginning of the twentieth century paying little attention to the 'Urabi Revolt although they concede that "the first significant speculation over the issue of national identity in modern Egypt occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."<sup>13</sup>

Gershoni and Jankowski recognise the importance of Egypt's transformation over the nineteenth century with the emergence of a new native educated elite, the development of Egypt's printing press, integration into the world economy and the political developments of the 1860's and 1870s. These processes led to greater public discussion in Egypt about its political and religious affiliations, and the nature of Egyptian national identity but according to Gershoni and Jankowski, the political movement of the 'Urabists that emerged between the years 1879-1882 was never able to divorce itself fully from its allegiance to the Ottoman state and Sultan. They see the political demands of the Urabists as falling short of independence due to Egypt's religious affiliation being part of the 'umma under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan. Gershoni and Jankowski note that the political leaders of the 'Urabi movement

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<sup>12</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p193.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p4.

“repeatedly expressed their loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan...and declared their struggle as being one of maintaining Islamic unity in the face of the threat of European domination.”<sup>14</sup> But importantly, this leads Gershoni and Jankowski to see the 'Urabi Revolt not as a movement seeking Egyptian independence and therefore as “full-blown” nationalism but as a movement which stimulated a greater sense of national consciousness and raised important questions about the nature of Egyptian national identity but nevertheless sought to remain within the political and religious structure of the Ottoman Empire and therefore the Muslim 'umma.

There is no question that the idea of the nation was seen with suspicion as a threat to Egypt's status within the 'umma by many Muslims at the time. Despite increasing levels of political autonomy for Egypt from the Ottoman Empire over the course of the nineteenth century,<sup>15</sup> Egyptians mostly remained loyal to the Ottoman Sultan precisely because of his role as the head of the Islamic 'umma. I maintain in this thesis that 'Urabi's nationalist movement sought Egypt's political independence from the Ottoman Empire but that nationalist demands were pitched cautiously by asserting first the desire to remain loyal to the Ottoman Sultan and to continue to be part of the Muslim 'umma but alongside this, they demanded political independence. They did this by drawing a distinction between loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan and remaining part of the religious community of the 'umma and Egypt's right to be politically independent and run its own affairs of state. Asserting their desire to remain within the 'umma, albeit with greater political independence by expressions of loyalty to the Sultan were necessary steps in securing his support in their opposition to Khedive Tawfiq, allaying popular fears about a break with Islamic tradition and attracting popular support for their struggle. The political calculations were further complicated by the role of the British, and the nationalists considered the support of the Ottoman

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>15</sup> Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, p3. Jankowski and Gershoni continue this point and assert that the “nominal Ottoman authority” over Egypt led “educated Egyptians [in the nineteenth century] to reconsider the subject of Egyptian political allegiance and affiliation.”

Sultan vital if they were to avoid a British invasion knowing that the British and the Ottoman Empire would want to avoid a direct confrontation.

In this thesis, I argue that the 'Urabi Revolt of 1879-1882 was a nationalist revolt composed of Egyptians who believed themselves to constitute a nation. Their aims were multiple, and in chapter 6, I show that their first aim was to make clear to the Ottoman Empire their loyalty to it in Islamic terms but their insistence on political independence from it. The second aim was to limit the power of the local ruling Khedive and to arrest control of the government and state and when this seemed impossible, the nationalists attempted to depose him on the grounds that he had abandoned Egypt and allied himself with the British (see chapter 7). The third aim of the nationalists was to appeal to the British for support and understanding of their desire to limit the power of the Khedive, and in the course of this, to offer assurances to the European powers and the Dual Control to honour Egyptian debts to its European creditors. When these attempts failed and it became clear that Britain would use force to maintain Khedive Tawfiq in power, the nationalist position towards the British changed and their nationalist movement was directed at resistance against British occupation of Egypt.

My thesis argues that all three aims were framed within an Islamic and nationalist context. The nationalist paradigm appealed to an established sense of Egyptian national identity and consciousness. It emphasised the need for Egyptians to participate in the struggle to defend the Egyptian nation in the face of external threats and to turn against a ruler who had been seen to have abandoned the nation and its people. Its ideology was patently nationalist urging national unity and national sacrifice seeing Egyptians as possessing an historical continuity, a particular and unique Egyptian Arabic, an established and recognisable territory and a glorious past which incorporated pharaonic myths of descent and a central position within Islamic civilisation (see chapters 4 and 5). From an Islamic perspective, the movement saw the protection of the nation as also protection of Egypt's Islamic status and identity. The imposition of external rule by Britain or other European powers suggested to the nationalists, a departure for Egypt as part of the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim

'umma and in calling for the deposition of the Khedive, the nationalists claimed this to be an Islamic act incumbent on Muslims because of the Khedive's alliance with the British in the final months before the British invasion of Egypt in 1882.

In much of the historiography of the 'Urabi Revolt, the role of the Islamic intellectual elite or 'ulama (plural of *'alim*) I argue has been overlooked and I further argue that 'ulama were in fact, at the forefront of debates about Egyptian nationalism and its implications for Egypt's position within the 'umma and loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan during the years 1879-1882. While many 'ulama supported the nationalist movement and added their voice to arguments which saw no contradiction between Egyptian political nationalism and Egypt's desire to remain part of the Muslim 'umma, many other powerful 'ulama firmly rejected this claim. 'Ulama views and opinions on this subject became a crucial part of the political battleground for all the sides in the confrontation and control of al-Azhar, Egypt's influential mosque-seminary became part of the wider political struggle. Two key confrontations are highlighted in chapter 6 which represent important events in the struggle for Islamic legitimacy. The first confrontation was an attempt by 'Urabi and the nationalists to replace the Sheikh al-Azhar, who they perceived to be opposed to their nationalist aims, with someone supportive and the second confrontation was an attempt, by 'Urabi himself, most likely backed by pro-nationalist 'ulama to secure a fatwa (religious legal ruling) questioning and indeed criticising the Khedive's Islamic credentials. Both attempts were partly successful but their outcomes were not as the nationalists had hoped.

The 'ulama are broadly defined as religious scholars “who acquired their formal religious training and credentials in established madrasas [schools: sing. *madrassa*; pl. *madaaris*] and religious colleges [and act as] teachers, preachers, judges and administrators in the state religious system”.<sup>16</sup> Meir Hatina rightly points out that not only do 'ulama exist within the state system but others “were unaffiliated scholars who

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<sup>16</sup> Meir Hatina, 'Introduction' in Meir Hatina (ed.), *Guardians of the Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama in the Middle East*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p.1.

adopted a more critical and activist stance and often clashed with official 'ulama and the political authorities over religious and socio-political issues".<sup>17</sup>

Hatina's definition requires clarification in three important ways. Firstly, it is important to recognise the diversity of professions 'ulama entered as well as the unorthodox channels by which many became 'ulama or men of religious importance and part of the Islamic intellectual elite. For instance, as the printing press emerged in Egypt in the nineteenth century and as newspapers proliferated, many 'formally' trained 'ulama pursued careers in journalism or became writers or literary figures. Indeed, two of the 'ulama I focus upon in this thesis – Muhammad 'Abduh and Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi spent considerable amounts of their professional life outside the professions Hatina mentions and instead were prolific writers and journalists. It is also important to mention that these two important 'ulama also spent considerable time as part of the 'formal' 'ulama corp. Tahtawi, an outstanding young scholar was brought to the attention of Muhammad 'Ali and was appointed the Imam for one of the first Egyptian student missions despatched to France and 'Abduh assuming the role of Grand Mufti, the highest Islamic legal position in the country. Another of the Islamic thinkers that I focus upon – Abdallah al-Nadim – never completed his formal religious training choosing a literary and journalistic career path which his parents disapproved of. Despite this, Nadim's reputation as a man of learning and knowledge meant that he was a regular lecturer at al-Azhar University and his contribution to the emergence of religious nationalism in Egypt and his influential role in the 'Urabi Revolt cannot be ignored.

Secondly, 'ulama who were part of the state religious system must not only be seen as merely underpinning and legitimising the state authorities but they also exerted pressure on and influenced the state and wider political authorities from within to act in certain ways, which meant sometimes opposing the political authorities in power. Finally, both 'types' of 'ulama – those affiliated to the state and those not – were highly influential amongst the people and were held in high esteem, as a result of their social

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.2.



and religious functions as teachers, preachers, jurists and guardians of orthodoxy and faith. Seen through this broader prism and taking into consideration that the title of 'alim was entirely honorific, the 'ulama's importance is evident not just as passive 'underwriters' of the existing social orders but more broadly as active mediators and agitators through formal and informal channels in the relationship between state and society.

Through focusing on the role of the Egyptian 'ulama in the years 1879–1882 and in particular the above four thinkers, I analyse a variety of both primary and secondary sources which provide insights into the views and opinions of the four 'ulama on four major political issues of that period which generated a wide-ranging and highly contentious debate within 'ulama circles. These issues included: 1) the rise of a native nationalist movement under the leadership of Ahmed 'Urabi; 2) the growing opposition to and criticism of Egypt's local ruling Khedival monarchy; 3) Egypt's links to the Ottoman Empire and 4) Britain's invasion of Egypt, culminating in its occupation of Egypt in September 1882. In debating these issues, the 'ulama put forward a variety of responses which bring into question traditional notions of the views of conservative and reformist 'ulama. There was no monolithic 'ulama view of the issues mentioned above with differences arising even within conservative and reformist 'ulama 'camps'. The debates I focus upon in this thesis demonstrate that pro-nationalist 'ulama held both conservative and reformist outlooks and were a key component in the nationalist movement where they reassessed Egypt's links to the Ottoman Empire and its position within the 'umma and brought into sharp focus ideas of community, progress and modernisation.

The 'ulama of the nineteenth century in Egypt have been seen by many contemporary scholars as having been largely marginalised by the reforms of Muhammad 'Ali and his successors. Over the course of the nineteenth century, a combination of reforms in land ownership, law and educational provision coupled with the dislocating effects of state centralisation, the increasing modernisation of the state and society, the emergence of a new educated elite and the 'ulama's own overriding conservatism and opposition to reform, led scholars of the Egyptian 'ulama to see them as no longer

occupying central positions of power within government and the state bureaucracy but relegated very much to the political periphery. Due to reforms of these sectors that 'ulama had previously exercised a monopoly over, and the confiscation of much of their land which was an important independent source of wealth, the 'ulama were viewed as having lost many of the elements of their social status and position that had once imbued them with significant political influence and power which they often used to impact on matters of government and politics. The analysis I offer in this thesis reassesses the conventional view of the impact of reforms on the 'ulama's ability to act and influence political, social and cultural affairs. The view I put forward is one that shows the impact of reforms of the nineteenth century were not as damaging as the conventional wisdom on this matter suggests because 'ulama were either able to retain or insulate significant areas of their status and functions from the reform process or that the reforms themselves were insufficient and not fully implemented. My analysis also questions the view of the 'ulama – a view that is gradually being revised by other scholars in the field – that see them as deeply conservative, entrenched within a dogmatic view of community narrowly defined by Islamic principles of 'umma and orthodoxy. On the contrary, while evidence suggests that many 'ulama held a conservative outlook, my analysis demonstrates that many reformist and conservative 'ulama were in fact much more outward looking than scholars have previously suggested and many were willing to embrace the ideas of modernity and the modern nation-state and were able to articulate its compatibility with Egypt's Islamic heritage and to Islamic principles of community and progress.

### **Egypt's Islamic Background**

Egypt's Islamic history begins when it was conquered in 641 AD<sup>18</sup> by the Arab General 'Amr ibn al-Ass during the reign of the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (r.634–644) and brought under Islamic rule.<sup>19</sup> Islam has since then occupied a prominent place within the Islamic world, and an un-broken Islamic history from this date: while

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<sup>18</sup> The date system used in this thesis will be based on the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>19</sup> Max Rodenbeck, *Cairo: The City Victorious*, London, Picador, 1998, p.51.

Egypt has always had a number of minority confessional communities, including Coptic Christians and Jews, it is, and has been overwhelmingly Muslim since its seventh century invasion by Muslim Arabs. The first two centuries of Arab rule were characterised by numerous local revolts against rule by the 'Umayyad dynasty (664–749)<sup>20</sup> and the high levels of taxation imposed by Damascus. Arabic became the language of government in 706 and remained the national language until the present day, despite a strong Turkish linguistic influence in Egypt for a significant period during some of the time of Egypt's Ottoman history (1517–1922). By the tenth century (969), Egypt had become part of the Fatimid dynasty and it is during this time that Cairo (al-Qahira, meaning 'the victorious') was built, replacing the ancient city of Fustat as the capital.<sup>21</sup> It was also during the Fatimid period that the university/mosque complex of al-Azhar was built, which was to quickly emerge as a prominent centre of learning and instruction in Egypt and indeed throughout the Muslim world.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Azhar was founded in 969 and was opened for prayers in 972 during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz.<sup>23</sup> The prominence of al-Azhar raised Egypt's importance in the Islamic world and, although initially a centre of learning under Shi'a Islam, al-Azhar became one of the most important centres of learning within the Sunni tradition of Islam, offering instruction in all four of the main schools (sing. *madhhab*; pl. *madhaahib*) of Islamic legal interpretation after the Ayyubid dynasty assumed control of Egypt in 1171.<sup>24</sup> Students from all over the Islamic world aspired to gain

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<sup>20</sup> Albert Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples* London, Faber & Faber, 1991: see Hourani's timelines for the major Islamic dynasties.

<sup>21</sup> Rodenbeck, op. cit. *Cairo*, p.67.

<sup>22</sup> Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning*, Washington, DC, Middle East Institute, 1961, p.8.

<sup>23</sup> Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Dodge, op. cit. *Al-Azhar*, p. 8.

an education from al-Azhar and al-Azhar 'ulama quickly gained widespread recognition for their Islamic knowledge, piety and pedagogical function.<sup>25</sup>

After the Fatimid period, Egypt fell into 'Ayyubid hands (1171–1250) and this period is also characterised by being governed by an empire with its capital in Damascus. The 'Ayyubids incorporated Mamluk slave soldiers into their army but by 1250, the Mamluks had overthrown the 'Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt and became rulers of Egypt themselves. Mamluks were of Circassian origin, recruited as slaves, and were to remain prominent in Egypt right up to the modern period when, in the late 1870's, Turco-Circassian dominance of the Egyptian army was to play a vital role in the emergence of a native nationalist movement. By 1517, Mamluk rule in Egypt had collapsed and Egypt entered its Ottoman phase, which was to last until the British invasion in 1882. But, although Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1517, the Mamluks continued to nominally rule Egypt, mainly because of the weakness of Ottoman control.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Egypt remained an Ottoman province until British occupation and, while it enjoyed considerable autonomy from Istanbul for much of this period, it remained an important territory of the Empire and therefore at the heart of the Islamic 'umma. Egypt's Islamic history is thus an important characteristic of modern Egyptian identity, demonstrating a long and continuous association with Islam and being one of the major sources of Egyptian cultural identity.

### **The Establishment of the 'Ulama**

From around the end of the 'Umayyad dynasty, a significant body of Islamic knowledge began to develop around the study and exegesis of the Quran and the narratives of the Prophet Muhammad's traditions (Hadith) which were seen as the sacred sources of Islamic law (Shari'a). Nikki Keddie tells us that "[w]hile the first hereditary dynasty of Caliphs, the 'Umayyads (661–749AD), often ignored the growing body of educated religious leaders, these men achieved a firmer status under

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<sup>25</sup> Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform and Conservatism*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517–1798*, London, Routledge 1992, p.3.

the 'Abbasid dynasty (749–1258AD)".<sup>27</sup> The increasing importance of these educated religious scholars was due, in part, to the passing of the era where the Muslim community was led by Muhammad and his immediate successors, referred to as the *Rashidun* (Rightly Guided) Caliphs.<sup>28</sup> They are termed *Rashidun* Caliphs because they are acknowledged by Muslims to have been sufficiently close to the Prophet Muhammad and therefore to possess unique qualities in interpreting the Quran and the Prophet's actions and deeds (Sunna) as the moral and ethical guide for Muslims and their behaviour. But, with the death of these Caliphs and the passing of the Caliphate to Damascus and the 'Umayyads, a need arose for men to be specifically trained and versed in the accepted ways in which to interpret the sacred sources of the Shari'a, which would ensure orthodoxy in Islamic practice and the implementation of God's will among Muslims.

Towards the end of the 'Umayyad dynasty, in the early 'Abbasid era, as Islam expanded and absorbed wider territory into its domain, it also encountered greater numbers of non-Muslim populations with alternative religious practices, divergent social and cultural understandings and who communicated in languages other than Arabic. Consequently, in an effort to retain the 'authenticity' of Islam, greater significance was given to the emerging body of educated religious scholars and "the formation of an identifiable corps of 'ulama – scholars, jurists and teachers learned in the Islamic sciences – is a product of the early 'Abbasid period".<sup>29</sup>

Like most nouns in the Arabic language, the word 'ulama derives from a three letter verbal root (*ain laam meem*).<sup>30</sup> The verbal root is the verb 'to know' and as a noun,

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<sup>27</sup> Nikki Keddie, 'Introduction' in Nikki Keddie (ed.) *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1972, p.2. See also Hourani, op. cit. *History of the Arab Peoples*.

<sup>28</sup> The *Rashidun* Caliphs were the Prophet Muhammed's first four immediate successors: Abu Bakr (632–634 AD), Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644 AD), Uthman ibn Affan (644–656 AD), Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661 AD).

<sup>29</sup> Keddie, op. cit. 'Introduction', *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, p.2.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Wehr (ed. J.Milton Cowan) *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, London, Macdonald & Evans Ltd., 1980, pp.635–37.

the word 'ulama means 'the ones possessed with knowledge' or the possessors of knowledge. Fulfilling a variety of key religio-legal and pedagogical functions, these 'possessors of knowledge' – 'ulama – have been a crucial part of Islamic societies since their emergence. Through performing these functions, 'ulama also came to possess considerable influence and moral authority among the ordinary people, which stemmed from their core 'ilm (Islamic knowledge) and ability to interpret the sacred texts of Islam. However, at the political level, seeing the importance and political utility of the 'ulama's influence among the masses, Caliphs and rulers have all sought in varying degrees, to use this influence for political ends, which has ensured that the 'ulama have nearly always been close to their society's political centre and, at times, wielded considerable political influence.

Two important factors have remained more or less constant in the functioning of the 'ulama since their emergence during the eighth century. The first of these pertains to their particular functions, which incorporate the religious, the legal and the educational spheres of society. So for instance, 'ulama have nearly always been associated with performing religious duties, the main ones being leading the mosque congregation in prayer (as Imam), the functioning of the mosque and the delivery of the Friday sermon (as Khatib). Another important element of their functions has been to interpret the sacred sources of Shari'a law, being the Quran and Hadith and to adjudicate in legal disputes as judges (Quda), jurists (Fuqaha, pl.; Faqih, sing.) and as Islamic givers of legal opinion (Mufti). These judgements were mainly given through the official court system or through the issuing of legal opinions (fatwa). Finally, 'ulama have nearly always been responsible for the provision of education and have determined the subjects taught and the manner of the teaching; it is the 'ulama who have, in the main, delivered this teaching. In Islamic societies, religious knowledge and knowledge of Islam's sacred sources came to dominate education so the 'ulama became "the gatekeepers of Islamic learning."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hatina, op. cit. 'Introduction', *Guardians of the Faith*, p.3.

The second enduring feature of the 'ulama has been the type and ways in which they have received their own education. In the main, they studied in *madaaris* and received an entirely Islamic education studying subjects such as 'Hadith or Prophetic Traditions', 'Interpretation of and Commentary on the Quran', 'Fundamentals and Sources of Shari'a', 'Islamic Theology', 'Fiqh or Islamic Jurisprudence', 'Arabic Language and Grammar, Verbal Expressions of Concepts and Content and Logic'.<sup>32</sup> Although many 'ulama may have begun their learning at a young age at home, in order to achieve the status of 'ulama, it was necessary to study at a *madrassa* under a reputable 'alim or group of 'ulama. But ironically, although 'ulama training often took many years, "no one was ever employed as an 'alim nor granted a degree as one. The title was honorific."<sup>33</sup>

Islamic teaching and instruction took place in the mosque, which was used not only as a place of worship but also as a place of learning. Later, around the eleventh century the development of the *madrassa*<sup>34</sup> meant that dedicated centres of learning were established in order to teach a growing number of 'ulama that were required by an expanding state bureaucracy. These *madaaris* were run entirely by 'ulama and funded through charitable endowments (*awqaf*) and donations, which were also managed by 'ulama. These two factors meant that education provision remained largely independent from political authorities and equally important was the 'ulama's monopoly over education and learning until the early nineteenth century.

Through their integral functions as Islamic legal scholars, teachers and preachers, 'ulama became powerful and respected men. At the local village level, 'ulama were important social functionaries fulfilling these and other related duties while at the political level, senior 'ulama – or 'elite' 'ulama – occupying positions at the higher

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<sup>32</sup> 'Abd al-Mut'al al-Sa'idi, *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar (History of Reform in al-Azhar)*, Cairo, Matba'at al-Itimad, 1943, pp.34–43.

<sup>33</sup> Arnold Green, *The Tunisian 'Ulama, 1873–1915: Social Structure and Social Process*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1976, p.41.

<sup>34</sup> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1981.

levels of the overall 'ulama structure were often attached to the Caliph's imperial court, the Houses of certain rulers and powerful tribal chiefs. Aside from the 'ulama's purely educational and religio-legal role, their close relations with the political rulers also enabled them to fulfil an important political role of sanctioning the rule and policies of the particular ruler. They often advised rulers on whether a law, a war or a tax was justified on Islamic grounds. Of course, these 'ulama were not independent of the pressure exerted on them from being part of the House of the ruler and so Islam was often reconciled with the actions of the ruler rather than the other way round.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, by "1500 'ulama had evolved into a powerful body of men, highly respected in society with considerable sources of personal and corporate wealth and a large influence in the shaping of Muslim societies."<sup>36</sup>

### **Modernisation and Reform in Nineteenth Century Egypt**

The nineteenth century was a period of great change in Egypt, when the country experienced significant transformation and modernisation in many spheres, including its economy, its political structure and system of rule, the nature of the state and its institutions, its relationship with the Ottoman Empire as well as its wider regional and international relationships.<sup>37</sup> Egypt's transformation and modernisation during the course of the nineteenth century was initiated by Muhammad 'Ali (r.1805–1848), the Ottoman General in Egypt who, after the French evacuation in 1801, was elevated to the position of Vali (Governor) on the insistence of, and as a result of, significant political pressure exerted by the Egyptian 'ulama.

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<sup>35</sup> Keddie op. cit. 'Introduction', *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, pp. 1–3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.2.

<sup>37</sup> There are a number of authoritative books on this period of Egyptian history, some of which focus on particular aspects of Egyptian society while others examine the sweeping changes that took place during the nineteenth century. See P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt: from Muhammed 'Ali to Mubarak*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1991; Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community: An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804–1952*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *Tarikh al-Haraka al-Qawmiyya wa Tatawwar Nizam al-Huqm fi Misr (History of the National Movement and the Development of the System of Government in Egypt)* 3 Vols. Cairo, al-Nahda Publishing House, 1929–30; and by the same author, *Asr Isma'il, (Isma'il's Era)*, 3 vols. Cairo, al-Nahda Publishing House, 1932.



During the reign of Muhammad 'Ali and his successors in the nineteenth century, Egypt gradually distanced itself further from the Ottoman Empire while, at the same time, Egypt's ties to Europe grew ever closer through the financing and development of the Suez Canal, regular educational missions of Egyptian students and teachers being despatched to Europe, the appointment of European architects, designers and engineers to redesign and modernise Egypt's cities, districts and wider infrastructure and the large numbers of European technocrats flocking to Egypt as advisors to the Egyptian ministries, or as teachers, doctors, lawyers, bankers and travellers in search of fortune and adventure.<sup>38</sup> In matters of trade and finance too, Egypt grew increasingly dependent on Europe, with much of Egypt's economic transformation based on an increasing cotton yield and its sale to the cotton mills of northern England.<sup>39</sup>

These and other measures were part of a larger and more penetrating process of modernisation that Egypt underwent from the beginning of Muhammad 'Ali's rule to the end of Isma'il's rule in (r.1863–1879). It began with developing Egypt's military in order that it could defend itself from imperial encroachment either from Britain or France, or from the threat of the Ottoman Empire exerting greater control over Egypt. In order to fuel the growth and modernisation of Egypt's military, much of Egypt's land was placed under direct state ownership, a new technical school system in Egypt was developed and regular student missions despatched to Europe that aimed to feed

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<sup>38</sup> Fritz Steppat, 'National Education Projects in Egypt Before British Occupation' in Peter M. Holt (ed.) *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt: Historical Studies from the Ottoman Conquest to the United Arab Republic* London, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 283–84. Steppat gives data for foreigners in Egypt: "From 1857 to 1861, an average of 30,000 foreigners came into the country each year; in 1862 they numbered 33,000; in 1863, 43,000; in 1864, 56,500; in 1865, 80,000." Steppat's figures taken from David S Landes, *Bankers and Pashas, International Finance and Economic Imperialism in Egypt*, London, np, 1958, pp.87–88.

<sup>39</sup> For Egypt's economic transformation during the nineteenth century culminating in huge levels of debt and ultimately Egypt's bankruptcy, see various commentaries most notably, J. C.B. Richmond, *Egypt 1798–1952: Her Advance Towards a Modern Identity*, London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977.

the army and the growing state with skilled manpower and bureaucrats tasked with the management of wide-scale reform and modernisation (see Chapter 3).<sup>40</sup>

These policies continued apace under Khedive Isma'il after a respite under Abbas I (r.1848–1854) and Said I (r.1854–1863), both of whom favoured a slower pace or outright rejection of reformist policies.<sup>41</sup> Under Isma'il, greater efforts were put into developing Egypt's education system from the primary level up, its economy in terms of trade; Egypt's cities and districts were rebuilt to resemble those of European capitals and other famous cities. Even its political institutions underwent significant reform, with Egypt's parliamentary system originating from Isma'il's period with the establishment of the *Majlis Shura al-Nuwwab* in November 1866.<sup>42</sup>

### The 'Ulama and Nineteenth Century Reforms

The ideas put forward by Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot and Daniel Crecelius on the changing role and power of the 'ulama during the nineteenth century<sup>43</sup> represent the dominant view in much of the literature on the 'ulama in nineteenth century Egypt. Both see the 'ulama's power and influence in society as declining significantly after the elevation of Muhammad 'Ali to power, particularly after 1809. For al-Sayyid, the major reason behind the 'ulama's decline was not merely that Muhammad 'Ali had

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<sup>40</sup> Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali Pasha, His Army and the Founding of Modern Egypt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984; Robert F. Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives, 1805-1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, Cairo, American University of Cairo Press, 2000; Safran, op. cit. *Egypt in Search of Political Community*.

<sup>41</sup> Ehud Toledano, Review of Juan Cole's *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1995, Vol. 31:2, pp.379–83.

<sup>42</sup> Landau, op.cit. *Parliaments and Parties*, p.8.

<sup>43</sup> These views are elaborated and put forward in Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt During the Early Nineteenth Century' in Peter M. Holt (ed.) *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt: Historical Studies from the Ottoman Conquest to the United Arab Republic*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot 'The 'Ulama of Cairo in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries' in Keddie, op. cit. *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot 'The Beginnings of Modernization among the Rectors of al-Azhar, 1789-1879' in William R. Polk and Richard Chambers (eds) *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The nineteenth Century*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1968; Daniel Crecelius, 'Nonideological Responses of the Egyptian Ulama to Modernisation' in Keddie, op. cit. *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*; Daniel Crecelius, *The 'Ulama and the State in Modern Egypt*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1967.

stripped them of power and their economic independence and privileges: it lay in “the introduction of westernising influences,”<sup>44</sup> which, she says, came in the form of importing European advisors to help reorganise “his administration on Western lines, introduce a Western-style system of education, [and develop] an efficient army modelled on European lines”.<sup>45</sup> For al-Sayyid, these factors are crucial in triggering the fundamental changes Egyptian society experiences whereby “the traditional social pattern of groups having a cohesive force and an internal organisation of their own that was independent of a central authority”<sup>46</sup> is gradually eroded and a new pattern is put in its place that gives rise to new social elites.

Crecelius, on the other hand, takes a slightly different view and looks at the ways in which the 'ulama reacted to the onset of modernisation and its associated processes. He argues that they displayed two initial responses to the modernising reforms, responses that were “instinctively defensive, [and] characterised by a strong desire for self-preservation”.<sup>47</sup> Contrary to al-Sayyid, Crecelius attributes the 'ulama with taking action to resist reforms, arguing that the 'ulama were “able to obstruct, delay or undermine new programs”.<sup>48</sup> But these responses failed to achieve their aims and, when the modernising reforms continued apace, the 'ulama's response changed from opposition to withdrawal. When opposition to the reforms failed, due to the growing strength of the state implementing the reforms and the 'ulama's own declining ability to exert political influence to shape the nature of reform, the 'ulama withdrew into those realms that they continued to control and preside over “in an effort to preserve them from contamination through contact with the modernising elements in society”.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. ‘The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt’, p.277.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 277–78.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.278.

<sup>47</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. ‘Nonideological Responses’, p.185.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.185.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.186.

While Crecelius and al-Sayyid broadly agree on the effects of Egypt's modernising reforms as triggering a virtually total fall from power of the 'ulama, it is worth explaining briefly how their approaches differ. Putting aside the loss of economic independence and their exclusion from the core of government, which they both agree upon, for al-Sayyid, the most important aspect to the 'ulama's decline during the nineteenth century was the gradual establishment of a new westernised social elite, "that was eventually to displace the 'ulama as the intellectual elite of the land".<sup>50</sup> Crecelius, by contrast, places greater importance on what he sees as the separation and isolation of the 'ulama from the modernising groups. For Crecelius, modernising reforms did not seek "to destroy the institutions of the old order but rather to create a new order alongside the old".<sup>51</sup> As the 'ulama increasingly failed to stop the reforms, they found that many of the reforms left their traditional spheres of authority untouched and so were able to retreat within them and isolate themselves from the wider reform project.

The reason why the 'ulama's traditional spheres of influence remained insulated from the modernising reforms was that, according to Crecelius, Muhammad 'Ali was "[u]nwillling to offend the religious prejudices of the 'ulama and the overwhelming majority of tradition-bound Egyptians or to tamper with a sacred revealed law".<sup>52</sup> Likewise, in al-Sayyid's view, although modernisation had created a new social elite composed of civil servants and administrators who had replaced the 'ulama as the 'men of the pen' and upset the traditional balance of Muslim society, she nevertheless concedes that Muhammad 'Ali "could not totally ignore tradition, for after all he was a Muslim ruler".<sup>53</sup> However, despite making these significant claims about the way in which the nineteenth century reforms enabled the 'ulama to continue in their traditional spheres of authority practically unaffected, no attempt is made to examine what these traditional spheres of authority actually were and, indeed, what this might mean for

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<sup>50</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt', p.278.

<sup>51</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Non-Ideological Responses', p.186.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the Ulama' in Egypt', p.278.

the status, power and influence the 'ulama may have continued to possess despite the disorienting reform process in Egypt during the nineteenth century. In fact, despite the reforms of Muhammad 'Ali and his successors throughout the nineteenth century, religion, and particularly Islam, continued to play a considerable role in the everyday lives of people and it is precisely here that the 'ulama, retreating from the modernising process, found themselves connected to the community of Muslims and where they continued to enjoy great moral authority among the masses.<sup>54</sup> Amidst great change, dislocation from previously recognised social structures and modernisation, religion may have represented an important stabilising mechanism for a population that remained highly religious. Indeed, more recent work has challenged the reductionist view and argued that “the loss of its [the 'ulama's] monopoly over educational and intellectual life did not result in marginality.”<sup>55</sup>

In assessing the role of the 'ulama in the 'Urabi Revolt, it is important to point out that Muhammad 'Ali's reforms, and indeed the process of modernisation that began under his leadership and continued through much of the nineteenth century, was largely confined to restricting the 'ulama's direct relationship and influence to the political centre in Egypt. As Crecelius concedes, “[h]aving eliminated the interference of the 'ulama in his government, Muhammad 'Ali left them virtually alone, to teach, think, write, or practice whatever they wanted so long as they did not undermine his programs within the sphere of government”.<sup>56</sup> If this was the case, and the 'ulama's spheres of authority, aside from their direct engagement with the political authorities, remained largely untouched, the extent to which the 'ulama became politically disabled and powerless must surely be questioned.

For instance, part of the 'ulama's political strength was the ability to rouse or restrain the masses which stemmed from their moral standing amongst the people. The

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<sup>54</sup> Meir Hatina, 'Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East: The Case of al-Azhar in Egypt', *The Muslim World*, Vol. 93:1, January, 2003, p.54.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.52. My insertion in brackets.

<sup>56</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses', p.186.

particular social functions that the 'ulama had carried out for generations – their roles as teachers, preachers, judges and experts on Islamic law, theology and practice – remained largely, but not wholly untouched, and through these functions, the 'ulama's moral standing and ability to influence the masses remained, I argue, for the most part unchanged. Moreover, while it is true that Muhammad 'Ali's attempts at state centralisation and modernisation may have warranted the exclusion of the 'ulama from his government because of their mainly conservative outlook and potential opposition to reforms, the reforms themselves were not entirely successful in removing all of the 'ulama's sources of social and political power which in fact derived from their religious, pedagogical and to a lesser extent their legal functions within a society that remained highly attached to Islam and Islamic practice. Indeed, by looking at the importance of Islam to Egyptian national identity and the ability of 'ulama to lend Islamic legitimacy to, and mobilise support for political movements, I suggest that 'Urabi and the nationalists had sufficient cause to bring the 'ulama back to the centre of the political sphere later in the nineteenth century. Indeed, in the more recent scholarly work that reconsiders the dominant notion of the 'ulama's decline during the nineteenth century, Hatina observes that “bending to the authority of the state did not mean the total submission of the religious establishment”.<sup>57</sup> There have also been other important revisions to our understanding of the 'ulama in the nineteenth century, none more so than the work of Indira Falk Gesink who shows, among other things that conservative 'ulama as well as those reform minded 'modernist' 'ulama were also supportive of 'Urabi's nationalist movement. These important contributions have shown that our understanding of the role of the 'ulama in political movements and the ways in which they remain important political actors requires further research and exploration.

### **'Urabi and the Emergence of Egyptian Nationalism**

By the 1870s during the reign of Khedive Ismail (r.1863–1879), a movement for greater constitutional safeguards against Khedival rule emerged, led by the prominent

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<sup>57</sup> Hatina, op. cit. 'Historical Legacy', p.52.

Turco-Circassian Muhammad Sharif Pasha (1826–1887). The movement sought to limit the powers of the Khedive by developing an Egyptian constitution and establishing an elected parliament that would take responsibility for governing Egypt. Although in part successful, the movement never really accumulated mass popular appeal probably because it operated on a level of abstraction from the mass of the population, who were suffering from unprecedented levels of economic hardship due to the high levels of taxation imposed by Khedive Ismail. These harsh measures were inflicted on Egypt by the Dual Control established in November 1876 by Britain and France in order to manage Egypt's bankrupt economy and pay for the substantial level of debt Egypt found itself in due to the Khedive's excessive borrowing to fund the country's modernisation and renewal. Muhammad Sharif Pasha's movement, largely dominated by the elite Turco-Circassians, failed to address how the constitutionalist aims were linked to the very real problems of poverty and social dislocation and was not able to stimulate mass popular support for the constitutionalist movement. The association of the Turco-Circassians with Egypt's nobility and elite class by many ordinary Egyptians may also have led to the movement's limited success in attracting popular support. However, the mere fact that visible attempts were being made at a separation of powers between the monarch and the parliament was an unprecedented and important step.<sup>58</sup>

Much more popular was the movement led by Ahmed 'Urabi, an officer in the Egyptian army. Initially a protest movement against the Khedive's favouritism towards the Turco-Circassian army officers as against the low status and position of native Egyptian officers, the movement quickly developed wider and more nationalist aims.<sup>59</sup> The Dual Control, coupled with unrestricted European dominance inside Egypt, was both crippling to the Egyptian economy and at the same time deeply humiliating to Egyptians generally. Many Egyptians believed Khedive Isma'il was responsible for their subservience to the European powers and, when he was forced to

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<sup>58</sup> Landau, op. cit. *Parliaments and Parties*.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-political Crisis in Egypt, 1878–1882*, London, Ithaca Press, 1981, p.153.

abdicate, his son and successor, Khedive Tawfiq was widely considered a feeble monarch under the control of Britain and France.<sup>60</sup>

In the years 1879–1881, a series of confrontations between Khedive Tawfiq and 'Urabi and the nationalists elevated 'Urabi's status as leader of the nationalists and from its beginnings as a military protest movement, the movement's demands extended wider and incorporated greater socio-economic and political demands. As a result, the movement came to be seen as representing the concerns of many social groups in Egypt, including the rural population, urban guilds and the broad groups that comprised the intelligentsia, including "medium and lower-level clerks, middle management in state and provincial bureaucracies, the graduates of the modern civil schools, the officer corps and cadets, journalists, and the Muslim and Coptic clergy".<sup>61</sup>

These social groups were opposed not only to the privileged position of the Turco-Circassian nobility and elite, they were also united against the growing presence and influence of the European powers in Egypt. According to the nationalists, Egypt "was under Turkish and European domination and not ruled by Egyptians themselves and the country's wealth was being disposed in debt payments to Europe".<sup>62</sup> The modernising reforms of the nineteenth century had led to the emergence of a new intelligentsia through the expansion of the state and its provincial and central bureaucracies, an emerging press and greater possibilities for social mobility due to the partial reform of the education system. This was the grouping that came to see Turco-Circassian and European domination of Egypt as hindering the nation's progress and limiting their own opportunities. On the other hand, other groups that coalesced around 'Urabi's nationalist movement had suffered considerably as a result of the modernising reforms, such as the 'ulama losing many privileges and much wealth through the confiscation of land, property and their roles in the management of

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<sup>60</sup> Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture, 1870–1919*, Cairo, American University Press, 2011, pp. 20–25.

<sup>61</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.22.

<sup>62</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.172.



the awqaf (charitable endowments) over the course of the nineteenth century, and the rural population who were aggressively taxed to service debt payments to the European governments. By 1880–1881, these groups were “unified by a sense of ethnic solidarity involving an (Arabic) linguistic revivalism, Egyptian regional patriotism and Islamic nationalism”.<sup>63</sup>

The nationalist movement came to make increasing demands for national independence and sovereignty in opposition to the local Khedive, the British and in the end the Ottoman Empire. Suspicious of 'Urabi and alarmed by the popular support 'Urabi appeared to enjoy, the Khedive, backed by the British, looked to first appease his movement with concessions such as replacing the Khedival government with one appointed by the 'Urabists in September 1881. But this and other measures served only to heighten 'Urabi's domestic popularity and further weaken the Khedive's position and authority. While relations between the Khedive and the British, on the one hand, and 'Urabi, on the other, became fractured beyond repair, the Ottoman Sultan used the uncertainty to try and increase Ottoman control over Egypt by courting both the Khedive and 'Urabi without making any outright public commitments to any of the parties. When under British pressure, the Ottoman Sultan was forced to repudiate 'Urabi and the nationalist movement and, with 'Urabi defying the Khedive's orders to resign, the British moved their fleet within range of Egypt's northern coastline close to Alexandria and made plans to invade in order to uphold Khedival authority in Egypt and protect its interests in the Suez canal and the financial debt Egypt still owed.<sup>64</sup>

In the early period of the rise of 'Urabi's movement, the 'ulama's role was not always prominent although many 'ulama did sign a National Party manifesto calling for greater national independence. However, as the 'Urabi movement evolved into a broad coalition of social groups whose aims became more nationalist, the 'ulama not only

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<sup>63</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.271.

<sup>64</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*. These events are covered extensively in Schölch's book and it serves as one of the most authoritative accounts of the 'Urabi Revolt and its antecedents. See also Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution* and account by al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*.

supported the movement in greater numbers but also became increasingly influential within it. 'Urabi and the nationalist movement saw Islam as a central feature of Egyptian national identity and, from this perspective, the 'ulama, who were still seen as the guardians of the faith, became central to the appeal of the nationalist movement. The overtly Islamic nature of the movement did sometimes clash with the Coptic clergy's view of Egyptian nationalism, which conceived of a civic nation under which religious diversity was accommodated. But when these differences came to the fore, the nationalists including the pro-nationalist 'ulama agreed that Copts were also an integral part of the nation and could not be excluded on the basis of their religion. Whether the inclusion of Copts was to ensure that Europe did not see their movement as anti-Christian or genuinely nationalist in its aims is uncertain. What is certain is that the movement, while making claims for greater independence and sovereignty, framed these demands within the context of a desire to retain Egypt's Islamic links to the Ottoman Sultan and the wider 'umma and the 'ulama became important in this strategy. At the same time, 'Urabi's nationalists pointed towards Britain as a greater 'infidel' enemy. Making the claim for greater independence in the face of the threat of British rule, they were able to portray themselves and their nationalism as imperative for the protection of Egypt's Islamic identity. Having significant members of the 'ulama among their ranks, sharing the same views, conferred greater Islamic legitimacy on the nationalist movement and provided an assurance to the Ottoman Sultan of Egypt's desire to remain within the 'umma. (See Chapter 6.)

The 'ulama became an important constituency for the nationalist movement also in relation to its opposition to Khedival rule. While Egypt enjoyed considerable autonomy from the Ottoman Empire, the Khedive remained the Sultan's representative ruler in Egypt and his authority and rule stemmed from the Sultan's approval. In the same manner in which Khedive Isma'il had been forced to abdicate in early 1879 on the command of the Sultan, so Khedive Tawfiq ruled under a similar shadow. Of course, the European powers had a hand in Isma'il's abdication, forcing the Sultan in order to prevent a wider crisis, but the European powers were also aware that they could not act in complete discord with the Ottoman Sultan. Understanding the relationship between the local rule of the Khedive and the power and authority of the

Sultan, 'Urabi and the nationalists made concerted efforts to further de-legitimize the rule of Khedive Tawfiq. Portraying Tawfiq as subservient to the British, they accused him of not serving the country's interests. Then, when he sought the protection of the British, they accused him of laying the ground for British rule in Egypt and thus Egypt's Muslims potentially being ruled by non-Muslims. Representing Tawfiq as personally responsible for this, 'Urabi and the nationalists accused him of apostasy and pro-nationalist 'ulama issued a fatwa denouncing his rule, quickly followed by a deposition order drawn up by a revolutionary council. Once again, 'ulama played a key role in nationalist opposition to the Khedive (See Chapters 6 and 7).

### **Beyond Modernism: Towards Islam and the Nation**

The 'ulama quickly became an important constituency for the nationalist movement, lending it legitimacy, widening its appeal and tapping into the 'ulama's nation-wide networks of support and patronage. But in the intellectual debates and at the level of ideas, it was clear that pro-nationalist members of the 'ulama had begun to articulate the importance of Islam to Egyptian nationalism and its central position as a constituent part of Egyptian national identity. With greater European penetration of Egypt over the course of the nineteenth century came the realisation of Egypt's relative decline. When Egypt's rulers began, in the early and mid-nineteenth century to modernise Egypt and embarked on wide-scale reform and transformation, the 'ulama responded in various different ways. Most conservative 'ulama rejected modernisation as blind imitation of an alien European model, which would result in the decline of religion and its importance in society as it had done in Europe. But others, albeit a small minority of reform minded 'ulama, put forward a much more nuanced and complex set of ideas that sought to identify some aspects of European Enlightenment rationalism that they believed were an integral and fundamental part of an authentic Islamic tradition. At the heart of the debate was the issue of education and reformist 'ulama criticised their conservative counterparts for wanting to retain outdated teaching methods and a system restricted to a narrow understanding of knowledge based almost entirely on the Islamic 'transmitted' sciences. Reformist 'ulama urged

their conservative colleagues “to teach modern sciences that would aid the cause of progress and allow Muslims to combat European subjugation”.<sup>65</sup>

The debates around education provision and reform in Egypt had wider implications in other areas of Egyptian society. If a modern education was meant to equip Egyptians with the relevant and appropriate skills to drive progress and arrest decline, then the nation, as the political unit, was put forward as the vehicle by which to drive national progress. 'Ulama who advocated educational reform did so in terms of national progress and here the aims of conservative and reformist 'ulama found a point of convergence. Conservative 'ulama were largely attracted to 'Urabi and the nationalist movement because of its opposition to Khedival rule and European penetration and influence in Egypt and the ways in which they associated both these to a further loss and decline of Egypt's Islamic identity and heritage. On the other hand, reformist 'ulama saw the nationalist movement as one that would usher in a new period of reform and renewal consistent with Islamic modernism and regeneration and beginning with educational reform. This is not to say that reformist 'ulama did not reject Khedival rule and European dominance, but they sought to articulate a compatibility between the ideas of educational reform and modernisation being vital the elevation of the nation, which together would provide the basis for the regeneration of an 'authentic' Islam. (See Chapter 4).

In this respect, my thesis examines mainly the work of four prominent figures whose lives span the nineteenth century: Rifa'a al-Tahtawi d.1873; Husayn al-Marsafi d.1890; 'Abdallah al-Nadim d.1895 and Muhammad 'Abduh d.1905 and their intellectual contributions to the idea of the Egyptian nation (see Chapters 4 and 5). Al-Tahtawi began his career in the religious sphere teaching at al-Azhar and acting as Imam (prayer leader) to the first Egyptian student mission to France in 1826 but later pursued a career in journalism and translation alongside his teaching and religious duties. During his time in France, he learnt French and studied extensively the works of European Enlightenment philosophers and, on his return to Egypt, translated many

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<sup>65</sup> Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, p.3.

of these works in Arabic exposing an Arabic reading public to these ideas for the first time. His work as head of the Egyptian State Translation Department was monumental in its output and his own writings had a significant influence on Egyptian intellectual life in the realms of educational reform, politics and social commentary. Although he died in 1873 and did not participate in the 'Urabi movement, his writings and translations are widely considered to have been the intellectual precursors to Egypt's reform movement, and indeed in framing the importance of Islam to the Egyptian nation which I outline in chapter four.

Husayn al-Marsafi remained a teacher, first within the formal al-Azhar 'ulama corps and then, from 1872, as part of the reformist group of 'ulama at the new teaching college, Dar al-'Ulum, until the end of his career. Considered a brilliant scholar of the Arabic language and literature, al-Marsafi was not a prominent political writer like the other three scholars I examine. His *Risalat al-Kalam al-Thaman (Treatise on Eight Words)* is the most overtly political of his works but, even here, he merely “hints at sympathy for the 'Urabist cause”.<sup>66</sup> The definitions and explanations he gives in his *Risalat* on terms that he described as being in increasing use around the late nineteenth century – the eight words – were highly influential within 'ulama circles and serve to illustrate well some of the ways in which words and concepts such as 'umma and *watan* (homeland) had evolved by the time of the 'Urabi Revolt. Indeed my analysis of his definitions of these concepts demonstrates similarities and overlapping features with ideas integral to the modern nation. I consider these important: they show how the definitions and criteria constitutive of modern nations may also be applied to the 'umma and I explore his definitions in chapter 4.

After graduating from al-Azhar, Muhammad 'Abduh spent much of his early career as a journalist and editor of the government mouthpiece newspaper *Waka'i al-Misriyya (Egyptian Events)*. Later in 'Abduh's career, he entered the formal 'ulama corps and assumed the high position of Grand Mufti of Egypt until his death. Between these

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<sup>66</sup> Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, UT, University of Utah Press, 2010, p.66.

phases of his career, he was a leading member of the 'Urabi movement even though he was its harshest critic in its early years, 1879–1880. Widely considered to be the most important thinker on Islamic modernism and reform, 'Abduh wrote and published extensively on a wide range of subjects including educational and legal reform, politics, moral philosophy and theology to name only a few.<sup>67</sup>

In respect to the modernisation and reform of Islamic societies he insisted that reform must come from Muslims themselves rather than be imposed from outside. He also warned against unquestioning imitation of the west, arguing that this would lead to the abandonment of Islam and greater moral, social and economic decay. To this end, he argued that the foundation for reform must be the wholesale reconstitution of the provision of education in Muslim countries. According to 'Abduh, Muslim education was outdated and restrictive, based as it was primarily on religion and in particular on the Islamic 'transmitted' sciences, and whose techniques of instruction consisted principally of imitation and duplication, thus stifling intellectual rigour and critical thought and enquiry. By providing a broad-based education which not only incorporated a religious basis but opened up non-religious fields of enquiry, Muslims would be able to master aspects of the world that would equip them with the necessary tools to embrace the modern world and to understand Islam's compatibility to it as well as its relevance and indeed role within it.<sup>68</sup> His political activity was aimed at limiting and ultimately ending European dominance of Muslim countries and he believed that, in Egypt, greater European control would lead to greater injustice for Egyptians and a greater gap between them and an 'authentic' Islam. Advocating in the first instance broadening the scope of education, 'Abduh also came to see the need for greater political agitation against European dominance, a lesson he most likely took from his mentor, the Islamic philosopher and moderniser Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

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<sup>67</sup> Muhammad 'Amarah, *Al-A'mal al-Kamila al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (The Complete Works of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh)*, Cairo, Dar al-Sharouk, 1993.

<sup>68</sup> See Jamal Muhammad Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, London, Oxford University Press, 1960 and Charles Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image: From its Origins to Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1972, as well as Chapters 4 and 5 in this thesis, for a fuller discussion of 'Abduh's ideas.

(d.1897).<sup>69</sup> Jamal al-Din saw the emergence of the printing press in Egypt as a fundamental tool of political agitation to be utilised by Egyptian intellectuals, 'ulama and political groups in order to disseminate ideas of nationalism, liberation and anti-occupation amongst the Egyptian masses and make them aware of the ills of European interference. It is from here that 'Abduh most likely embarked on a career in journalism in his early professional life. In chapter 4, I explore 'Abduh's intellectual contributions to the ideas of educational reform, Islamic modernism and their relevance to Egyptian nationalism. In chapter 5, I focus on his role in the 'Urabi Revolt and his opposition to it in its early years and how he then supported it becoming an integral strategist of the Revolt.

Out of the four thinkers, 'Abdallah al-Nadim is the only figure not to have spent time as part of the formal 'ulama corps but often lectured at al-Azhar and other mosques and seminaries all over Egypt. While al-Nadim would not be considered a member of the formal 'ulama corps, his status as an Islamic intellectual and role in the 'Urabi Revolt as one of its intellectual leaders necessitates his inclusion in this study. His contribution to the intellectual articulation of Egyptian nationalism and particularly to the relationship between language, education and nationalism is significant. He argued that language and mass communication were important agents of national cohesion, enabling common cultural understandings between people of the nation and the sharing and exchanging of views and opinions. But his nationalism also depended on a national education because, according to al-Nadim, the dissemination and sharing of 'national' ideas and opinions depended on literacy. But in late nineteenth century Egypt, he recognised the low literacy rates in Egypt and so began looking at other ways by which to communicate his ideas to the nation. In his journals, he used colloquial language, which made his ideas more accessible to ordinary Egyptians, and also began writing plays and dialogues in which he put forward his ideas on nationalism, modernisation, education and the reform of society. He was a robust and articulate

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<sup>69</sup> For a fuller analysis of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's thought, see Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1968.

debater and was considered the rhetorical voice of the nationalist movement. The importance he attached to educational reform and renewal was reflected in his efforts, largely unattained, to establish a nationwide network of modern schools.

As Islamic modernisers and reformers during the nineteenth century, all four thinkers experienced the effects of European penetration in Egypt and all four drew very similar conclusions. These included: the recognition of Egyptian society as being in decline relative to European society; that economic progress in Egypt lagged far behind that of other European countries; that the power of Europe was far greater than that of Egypt and other Muslim countries and allowed for their colonial subjugation; and that what led to Europe's position of strength was its embracing of new forms of knowledge, learning, scientific enquiry and innovation along with its representative government institutions and the national basis of its community. All four thinkers are in broad agreement on these matters and clearly saw Egypt's weaknesses in these terms. But despite recognising Egypt's difficulties, they all agreed that Egypt's area of strength relative to Europe lay in its possession of Islam and its Islamic character. As a result, all four thinkers attempt to address Egypt's weaknesses while at the same time retaining the importance of Islam to Egyptian society.

Although the intellectual and literary contributions of these prominent 'ulama has been – to varying degrees – examined previously,<sup>70</sup> this thesis attempts to understand their views and opinions on nationalism and Islam and their roles in the 'Urabi Revolt through the theoretical lens of nations and nationalism. Much of the previous research that has focused on the Islamic thinkers mentioned above has made valuable contributions to building an understanding of the intellectual history of nineteenth century Egypt. Many aspects of their thought have been analysed by scholars of the

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<sup>70</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (History of the Master and Leader Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh)*, 3 vols., Cairo, Dar al-Fadilla, 2005; Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*, London, Routledge, 2000; Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1966; Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, London, Frank Cass, 1966.



Middle East including their ideas on reform, modernisation, politics, Muslim society, literature, the press and the rise of nationalism. But although previous research has, in a limited way explored these thinkers views and opinions on nationalism and even their role in the 'Urabi Revolt, the fact that most scholars still consider the 'Urabi Revolt as a 'proto-nationalist' movement suggested to me, when looking at the literature on these four thinkers, that their writings on nationalism required greater scrutiny against the backdrop of an ever-increasing sophisticated body of theoretical explorations of the rise of nations and nationalism.

I began my research wanting to look into a much wider range of 'ulama opinions and views of nationalism in Egypt and, in particular, views and opinions they expressed on the emergence of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement. My initial impression was that the 'ulama were a highly politicised group, given the closeness of religion and politics in traditional Islamic societies through history. The emergence of a native nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century and its political confrontation with British and Ottoman imperialism and the local ruling Khedive and elite were the major political issues of the time. Given the 'ulama's political nature, the assumption behind my research at the early stage was that 'ulama would have been actively engaged in these debates, which my research was to focus upon.

While I have tried to remain as close to my initial impressions, assumptions and research plan, I have nevertheless had to make some changes due to practical considerations. First, the 'ulama are a geographically dispersed group, occupying positions in not only the religious institutions of the country, which were vast, but also in the judiciary, the schools and universities, the state bureaucracy and other associations like guilds and sufi orders. Unable to cover the large breadth of 'ulama in society, I made the choice to focus on those ulama whom I term 'elite' 'ulama. The institution of the 'ulama is hierarchical, with the Sheikh al-Azhar, Grand Mufti and the Muftis of the four main *madhaahib* occupying prominent positions within the overall hierarchy. There are also on the same level of seniority, the leaders of the sufi orders being the Sheikh al-Bakr and Sheikh al-Sadat, both hereditary positions with myths of descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Under these were some of the most renowned

preachers, teachers mainly at al-Azhar, and Islamic legal experts attached to the courts and wider judiciary. The hierarchical structure of the institution of the 'ulama meant that elite 'ulama had large followings of lower ranked 'ulama and were rarely contradicted by their colleagues, giving elite ulama great influence amongst the rest of the 'ulama below them. I consider the views, opinions and disagreements amongst the elite ulama as being broadly representative of the debates in wider 'ulama circles.

Another practical consideration that led me to focus on elite 'ulama, was the fact that many of the lower rank 'ulama, while crucial to the overall structure and dissemination of messages to the 'faithful', seldom wrote their views and opinions on paper or were published. In most cases, these 'ulama used the spoken word, arguably more important in Islam given its historical emphasis on memorisation of the Quran as a way to preserve the authenticity of the Revelation. In contrast, elite ulama, not often but occasionally, wrote books, articles in newspapers, and commentaries on legal texts and had their fatawa collected into large volumes. While the written material the elite 'ulama contributed to debates is, I think, yet to be fully discovered and still remains limited, the literature written by the elite ulama remains much more easily accessible as a resource and is more readily available for analysis.

Finally, the question of time was also of prime importance. The fieldwork for my research was conducted in Cairo, Egypt in 2007. Prior to my research, I had very little knowledge of Arabic except being able to read without understanding the text and spent time in 2002 and 2007 on language training. Analysing texts written by the 'ulama at the end of the nineteenth century presented its own set of linguistic problems, for the 'ulama wrote using complex grammatical structures derived from classical Arabic mainly out of use today. Arabic study courses mainly offered training in colloquial Arabic (spoken) or Modern Standard Arabic (fusha, pronounced fus ha) which is used in the newspapers and as the printed/written form. As well, the archives and libraries I visited remain highly disorganised, with manual card systems still largely in place. Where materials have been electronically catalogued, the organisation and storage of these materials is erratic, with many publications either 'not available for inspection', under restoration or simply not in their designated place.

The organisation, conditions of storage and retrieval of materials unfortunately poses significant obstacles for researchers of this period of Egyptian history and despite a huge array of relevant archival material, these remain untapped and largely undiscovered.

In this thesis, I have therefore relied mainly, but by no means entirely, on material that was available and more readily retrievable and has in part been examined in previous research. My thesis offers an alternative reading of primary texts available in that I examine the ideas and opinions of 'ulama and how these were tied to political events and, more particularly, the implications of their views as interpreted from their writings on nation formation in Egypt and the emergence of nationalism. In analysing the 'ulama's views and opinions on nations and nationalism, I situate these debates within a broader context concerning the nature and basis of community and the 'umma and a wider theoretical debate concerning the relationship between Islam and nationalism.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Islam and Nationalism: Theoretical Reflections and the Case of Egypt**

There is no part of the modern world where the impact of nationalism and the desire for ‘nations’ to be organised within their own nation-states has not been felt. The global appetite for nationalism has been complemented by increasing numbers of scholars exploring the phenomena in ever greater depth resulting in the development of a substantial body of theoretical literature which has sought to explain how nations and nationalism emerge under varying sociological and historical conditions. At the same time, the growing body of theoretical literature has been accompanied by an equally vast amount of empirical and historiographical studies on particular nations and nationalist movements around the world. Theoretical accounts of the emergence of nations and nationalism have developed into four main theoretical approaches which are the “modernist”, “ethno-symbolist”, “perennialist” and “primordialist” accounts of the rise of nations and nationalism. These theoretical approaches advance models and identify patterns in the rise of nations and nationalism and have been crucial in furthering our understanding of the subject both from a theoretical perspective and by the availability of greater numbers of empirical case studies of nationalisms from around the world against which theories can be tested and empirical studies can be further refined.

However, in relation to the Arab Middle East and in particular for the purposes of this thesis, historiographical accounts of the emergence of nationalism in Egypt, have to a large extent, neglected to include in their analysis a sufficiently comprehensive theoretical framework within which their empirical findings can be situated. In analysing Egyptian nationalism scholars have paid scant attention to the ‘Urabi Revolt and its nationalist tendencies, instead seeing it mostly as a local protest movement against Khedival authority, Turco-Circassian elitism and European influence and British Occupation. The central aspect of nationalism to the movement has been lost on most scholars, while only a handful have attributed it with “proto-nationalist” tendencies and a forerunner to the nationalism in Egypt of the early twentieth century.

For their part, most scholars of nationalism often disregard the historiographical accounts of Egypt and the emergence of nationalism in the Muslim world, in general an omission which has equally important consequences for the theoretical study of nationalism as well as the study of the rise of nationalism in Egypt. Without integrating into their work the ways in which scholars of Egypt have pointed towards Islam's importance to Egyptian nationalism (in the early twentieth century), scholars of nationalism have given very little attention to this important theoretical question. Where they have addressed this question, theories of nationalism have pointed towards the idea that, while nationalism emphasises the differences between national communities in areas of language, ethnicity, culture and traditions, Islam appears to transcend these differences by placing the 'umma and belief in Islam as the primary and most legitimate markers of Muslim group identity. Sami Zubaida notes that to "some western commentators, including Ernest Gellner, the Islamic idea of the community as the political unit is incompatible with the territorial nation-state".<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I look at how theorists of nations and nationalism have contributed to our understanding of the relationship between Islam and nationalism and the ideas of community that are central to both Islam and the nation. I highlight theoretical deficits and propose ways in which these deficits might be overcome by greater engagement with empirical evidence. My second aim in this chapter is to assess the way in which Middle East scholars and in particular scholars of Egyptian and Arab nationalism have, only in a partial manner, employed the increasingly wide ranging theoretical literature to test their empirical findings and conclusions on the rise of nationalism in Egypt. Despite many scholars recognising the importance of Islam to Egyptian nationalism, I find that historiographical accounts of Egyptian nationalism begin in the early decades of the twentieth century and not with the 'Urabi revolt of 1879-1882 which is largely ignored as an expression of nationalism albeit a failed one.

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<sup>1</sup> Sami Zubaida, 'Islam and Nationalism: Continuities and Contradictions', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10:4, 2004, p.407.

## Nationalism and Religion

It is surprisingly true that despite an eruption in interest in nationalism studies and the multiplying numbers of academic journals and books devoted to the subject, the field has witnessed a general decline in the importance scholars have attributed to the role of religion in modern nationalism.<sup>2</sup> In his book *The Construction of Nationhood*,<sup>3</sup> Adrian Hastings goes some way in addressing this deficit and attempts to show the interaction between religion, language, ethnicity and the nation in the construction of nationhood. For Hastings, ‘modernist’ theories of nations and nationalism are mistaken for two major reasons. First is their insistence on the emergence of nations in the modern period (i.e. late eighteenth century). The second reason is their “omission of the impact of religion in general and of the Bible in particular on the emergence of nations and nationalism”.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, although modernist theorists are correct in asserting that “the rapid spread of nationalist ideology and nation-creating movements [dates] from the late eighteenth century”,<sup>5</sup> crucially, their “denial of the first half of the story has inevitably skewed the whole.”<sup>6</sup> The ‘first half of the story’ for Hastings is the story of religion, language and ethnicity and their crucial interplay in the pre modern period. He argues that ethnicities in the pre modern era become nations only with the help of a distinct vernacular literature, his central example being the introduction of the Bible into the ethnic group. Of course not all ethnicities become fully fledged nations but those that make the leap successfully are

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<sup>2</sup> Monsterrat Guiberna and John Hutchinson (eds), *Understanding Nationalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001, p.3. See also John Armstrong, ‘Definitions, Periodization and Prospects for the *Longue Duree*’, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10:1/2, 2004, p.12. Here Armstrong agrees with the observation made by Guibernau and Hutchinson in the introduction to their book where they say, “[t]he relationship between religion and nationality is one of the most under-researched topics in the entire field, raising once again the significance of persisting factors in formation of modern societies”.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.12. Hastings also disagrees with the modernist view that nationalism engenders nations and not the other way around.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

almost always those ethnic groups whose vernacular evolves into a written language and who develop a “living literature”.<sup>7</sup>

It is at this point that religion is introduced into the analysis, more specifically, the Bible. In the first part of his account, Hastings focuses on England, on the multitude of ethnic groups and on the introduction of English translations of the Bible from the Vulgate. He argues that the spread of Christianity was also the spread of the Old as well as New Testament Bibles. The pivotal role of religion hinges on the fact that, as Christianity spread, the Bible had to be translated from the Vulgate into local vernaculars. Ethnic groups who had the Bible translated into their own vernacular then often developed living literatures and transformed their language from oral to a written language. Ethnic groups whose vernaculars went unnoticed may have persisted but almost never made the great leap from ethnic group to nation. For Hastings, then, the introduction of Christianity and the Bible to ethnic groups enabled their language to evolve and provide a sufficient resource for that group to coalesce around and increase the span of ‘imagination,’ as Benedict Anderson argues,<sup>8</sup> through the proliferation of a ‘living’ written language.

One more point worth mentioning here in Hastings’ analysis is that, for him, there is a definite “continuity in usage across more than six hundred years in the [English] language, that in the fourteenth century, the sense of ‘nation’ was already related explicitly to a distinct language group, and that it drew in large part on biblical and Vulgate roots”.<sup>9</sup> As far back as 1350, Hastings detects the term ‘*nacioun*’ in a verse in the Book of Revelation (5.9). Even more, he argues that in fact there is “overwhelming evidence that ‘*natio*’ was regularly used in the Middle Ages in the Vulgate sense of a people distinct by ‘language, laws, habits, modes of judgement and customs’”.<sup>10</sup> For Hastings then, this continuity highlights the very modern sense in which the word ‘nation’ was used and its theological and more specifically Christian

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London and New York, Verso, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Hastings, op. cit. *Construction of Nationhood*, p.18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.17.

underpinnings. Confining these continuities to the Christian world, Hastings' analysis becomes too narrow. The present day Israeli nation-state, as well as the wider Jewish nation, have their origins in the Old Testament and therefore point to a much longer continuity. It could be argued that in fact Hastings understates the case of Christianity and its continuity, if one sees the Jewish nation being the basis of the Christian political model.

Turning his attention to Islam, Hastings argues that the same reasoning cannot be applied to the Muslim world because, although a multitude of ethnic groups does indeed exist, the language of the Quran was Arabic and the "Muslim attitude to it made translation almost impossible. For the religious person it has to be read, recited out loud five times a day, or listened to in Arabic".<sup>11</sup> Unlike Christianity, Islam was, from the start, opposed to a multitude of nation-states because of its emphasis on a world empire – the universal 'umma based not on ethnic or national differences but on a community of believers. Moreover, the diversity of vernaculars to which Christianity was so suited, was not the same in Islam. On the contrary, Islam and the universal 'umma were based on the possession of a single and genuinely sacred language – Arabic: the language of God and of the Arabs. Asserting the difference between Islam and Christianity in the process of nation formation, Hastings concludes that, "in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.201. There is a point of contention here with Hastings' argument. He is quite right to point out that the Muslim attitude to the Quran is that it must be read and recited in the Arabic. This obligation, however, falls only on Muslims. The Quran has in fact been translated into almost every language. With the strong proselytizing tradition within Islam, the Quran soon became central to this aim. Various 'ulama and Caliphs believed that translating the word of God would inevitably attract people who spoke other languages and, when converted, they should be taught Arabic, as all Muslims should. Moreover, while Hastings argues that a single Arabic language had a homogenizing effect for Islam and the people it encountered in its newly conquered territories, he does not seem to take account of Islamic expansion into Persia which indeed introduced the Arabic Quran but the language of the people remained Persian, ditto the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish language. It is also unclear why he believes the same homogenising effects were not felt in the Christian world by Latin being the sacred Christian language until the Reformation. Indeed, Gellner reflects on "what would have happened in Western Europe had industrialization and all it involves begun during the High Middle Ages, before the development of vernacular literatures and the emergence of what was eventually destined to become the basis of the various national high cultures" (Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism: New Perspectives on the Past*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, pp.78–79).



consequence the whole cultural impact of Islam is necessarily to Arabise, to draw peoples into a single world community of language and government".<sup>12</sup>

Although Hastings' analysis is persuasive on the formation of nation-states in Western Europe and England in particular, the same cannot be said of his treatment of Islam. According to him, Islam as a religion plays little or no part at all in the formation of nation-states in the Islamic world. Yet a cursory glance at a handful of 'successful' nationalisms around the Muslim world reveals the limits of this assertion and in my later review of some of the literature on Arab and Egyptian nationalism, I show that region scholars put forward a very different view. Leaving Egypt aside for now, in the Arab world, the formation of the Saudi state and its nationalist ideology is difficult to dissociate from the orthodox Sunni ideology of Wahhabism. Beginning with the mid eighteenth century alliance between Muhammad ibn al-Saud and the orthodox Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to the formation of the unified Saudi state 1932–1934, Islam played a pivotal role.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Joseph Nevo argues – with a little exaggeration in my view and without taking into consideration the 'ulama of Egypt – that "the bond that developed between Wahhabi Islamic clerics ('ulama) and the family of al-Saud marks the modern inception of the use of religion as an instrument for both consolidating a collective identity and legitimising the ruling family".<sup>14</sup> Other nationalisms in the Muslim world further cast doubt over Hastings' claim, including the case of Egypt, which I highlight in this thesis, but also the cases of Iran (1979) and Pakistan (1947), two very significant non-Arab examples. Interestingly, even the case

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<sup>12</sup> Hastings, op. cit. *Construction of Nationhood*, p.201.

<sup>13</sup> Madawi al Rashid, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. See also Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, Oneonta, NY, Islamic Publications International, 2002; David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, London, I.B Tauris, 2009; Natana J. De-long-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004. This is a sample of some of the most compelling accounts of the rise of the Saudi state and Wahhabism. While these accounts differ on a number of contemporary issues, such as the role of Wahhabism in the rise of radical Islam and the 'Islamic global terrorist movement', most agree on the early relationship between the family of al-Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his brand of Islam.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Nevo, 'Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34:3, 1998, pp.34–53. See also Layish Aharon, 'Ulama and Politics in Saudi Arabia' in Metin Heper and Raphael Israeli (eds) *Islam and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, Beckenham, Croom Helm Ltd, 1984, pp.29–63.

of Arab nationalism raises critical questions of Hastings' theory as even Christian Arabs struggled to articulate a clear distinction between Arabism and Islam.<sup>15</sup> These and other cases not only force us to question Hastings' claim but also illustrate clearly areas where further research is acutely necessary.

Furthermore, Hastings' claim that Islam has had a tendency to unify Muslims or even to Arabise them must also be unravelled. First, there was little agreement amongst Muslims over the succession of Muhammad, which in turn created the perennial difference between the followers of 'Ali and Shi'ism and those of Abu Bakr and the more mainstream Sunni Islam. But, more than this, as Islam expanded, so various dynasties erupted, challenging in many cases the legitimacy of the existing Caliph and dynasty. As Albert Hourani expertly demonstrates:

*in certain regions, there were movements of opposition and separation in the name of some dissident form of Islam. Such movements resulted in the creation of separate political units, but at the same time they helped the spread of Islam by giving it a form which did not disturb the social order.*<sup>16</sup>

Histories play a crucial role in John Armstrong's in-depth analysis of Islamic and Christian civilizations in his *Nations before Nationalism*.<sup>17</sup> Armstrong's approach is to examine group identity over long periods of time and "present those aspects of European and Middle Eastern history that [he] considers being most important in the overall historical development of ethnicity".<sup>18</sup> One of these aspects is the difference in lifestyle between nomadic and sedentary populations. Armstrong draws a distinction between these different ways of life, arguing that for sedentary agricultural populations, attachment to specific territories constituted a major marker for group identity. In contrast, for nomadic peoples genealogical myths of descent were central

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<sup>15</sup> Yousef Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History, Nation and State in the Arab World*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000; Clarence E. Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1973; Sylvia Haim (ed.) *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1962; Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Al-Turk wa 'l-Arab (The Turk and the Arab)*, Cairo, al-Manar, Vol. III, 1900; Gellner, op. cit. *Nations and Nationalism*, p.79.

<sup>16</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *History of the Arab Peoples*, p.39.

<sup>17</sup> John Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.12.

to their perception of group identity. Armstrong asserts that “the impact of Islam, though ambiguous as to doctrine, has been extremely important as a historical force for adoption of nomad identity.”<sup>19</sup>

With the nomadic emphasis on nostalgia and myths of descent, he continues, the earliest Islamic empires, contrary to doctrinal Islamic egalitarianism, believed that the founders of Islam – the Arabs – were superior and that other groups were inferior. These three factors – Islam, Arab identity and nomadic desert conditions – coalesced in formulating myths of descent and were therefore “very important reinforcing mechanisms and genealogical myths”.<sup>20</sup> This, however, did not mean that, as Islam expanded, so did the drive to Arabise. Eurasian steppe nomads such as Turks, Mongols and Seljuks who converted to Islam did keep their ethnic identity, which suited the conquering Arabs, who retained a superior notion of their group identity as Arabs. This idea continued into the age of nationalism where the Turkish leadership of the ‘umma was a constant source of dissatisfaction amongst Arabs.

For the purposes of my argument, Armstrong’s analysis is useful because it shows the way in which “important as the legitimizing effect of Islam has been, nomadic nostalgia as a persistent identifying myth can exist independently”.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, contrary to orthodox opinion, Islam while in the process of expansion did in many cases significantly contribute to a sense of ethnic identity as in the case of its Persian expansion and its expansion into Turkey. Furthermore, Armstrong argues that in fact BC Christianity, with its Abrahamic tradition and the Exodus of the Ancient Israelites to the ‘Promised Land’, sharpened and focused ethnicity by conferring on them the status of ‘chosen people’. These same myths exist among Arabs where they have their own myths of ethnic election. For instance, a great source of pride among Arab Muslims is the belief that Muhammad, the holiest of prophets in Islam, was in fact Arab, and that God’s chosen language of divine revelation through the Quran was the Arabic language. In the case of Egyptian nationalism in the late nineteenth century

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp.52–53.

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, op. cit. *Nations Before Nationalism*, p.19.

during the ‘Urabi Revolt, the idea of a common linguistic identity in the shape of a specific Egyptian Arabic, and Egypt’s historical genealogy and sense of continuity with the Pharoanic tradition and later with Islam were strong currents within the nationalist movement. In particular, some pro-nationalist ‘ulama, sought to make a distinction between Arab Islam and Turkish Islam attributing Islam’s decline to the Turkish leadership of the faith.

### **Modernist Theories of Nationalism and Islam**

Modernist theories of the emergence of nations and nationalism take an altogether different perspective from those explored by Hastings and Armstrong. However, “whatever their [the modernists’] views about the relationship of nationalism to pre-modern ethnic sentiments, most scholars agree that nationalism, the global political movement that we know today, is a peculiarly modern phenomenon”<sup>22</sup> that dates from around the time of the French Revolution in 1789.

Modernist theories emphasise nationalism’s rise in the modern period due to a number of processes including most importantly industrialization and urbanisation. From this broad premise and its associated insistence of the modernity of nations and nationalism, modernist scholars claim among other things that history plays a minor role in the development of nationalism as nation formation and its associated ideology are modern phenomena. In fact modernists and in particular Eric Hobsbawm<sup>23</sup> view the historical arguments of nationalists suspiciously arguing that histories are often “invented traditions” as are historical attachments to territory or ideas about common cultural understandings and historical group attachments and that an over-emphasis on historical genealogies often blurs or makes dubious the claims of nationalist.

Ernest Gellner’s theory of nationalism is one such modernist view, which asserts that nations and nationalism are profoundly modern constructs inevitably resulting from

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<sup>22</sup> John Hutchinson, and Anthony D. Smith (eds) *Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.47.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992; see also Terrence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

the transformation of society from agro-literate societies to industrial societies. This process of modernisation necessarily erodes traditional structures as people move from rural societies to the new emerging urban centres. Traditional structures in rural societies are often those of low folk culture; religion and the Church and are replaced when people arrive in the cities by high culture supported by a state. Thus, Gellner states, “in the industrial world high cultures prevail, but they need a state not a church, and they need a state *each*. That is one way of summing up the emergence of the nationalist age”.<sup>24</sup>

With the transformation of populations from rural to urban society mainly in search of work, Gellner argues, the industrial age requires a mobile and culturally homogeneous society. For him, this is where the state and the education system play a crucial role. The new urban industrialised societies require their inhabitants to receive a standard form of education because of the technologically advanced nature of work that is carried out in the industrial age. Communication becomes “important because of complexity, interdependence and mobility of productive life, within which far more numerous, complex, precise and context-free messages need to be transmitted than had ever been the case before”.<sup>25</sup> The size of the new urban centres makes them anonymous, contrary to rural societies where people are acquainted with one another and often through many generations. The new urban dwellers, having arrived, find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder, often living in slums and undertaking the worst jobs. Culturally, they are also discriminated against because of their low culture, strange dialect and obscure religious practices. At this miserable juncture, there are, as Gellner sees it, two avenues open to them. First, they may assimilate over time into the dominant group by educating themselves or their children and eventually climbing the social ladder. Or, they develop an intelligentsia and this intellectual elite begins to articulate and establish aspects of group identity and a nationalist struggle for secession begins. Gellner draws the picture for us in his now famous passage on Ruritania:

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<sup>24</sup> Gellner, op. cit. *Nations and Nationalism*, pp.72–73 (italics in the original).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.74.

*As backward rustics speaking an obscure and seldom written or taught language, they had a particularly rough deal in the towns to whose slums they had moved. At the same time some 'Ruritanian' lads destined for the church, and educated in both the court and the liturgical languages, became influenced by the new liberal ideas in the course of their secondary schooling, and shifted to a secular training at the university, ending not as priests but as journalists, teachers and professors. They received encouragement from a few foreign, non-Ruritanian ethnographers, musicologists and historians who had come to explore Ruritania. The continuing labour migration, increasingly widespread elementary education and conscription provided these Ruritanian awakeners with a growing audience.*<sup>26</sup>

In Gellner's theory then, low culture and high culture come into contact with each another due to modernisation and the process of industrialisation. Low culture consists of a language that is little more than a regional dialect with no 'living literature', to use Hastings' term, and consists of folk tales and songs known only to its users, who are likely to be peasants from the countryside. When the adherents of this low culture come into contact with the high culture of the dominant group in the urban centres, this sparks the nationalist flame. For Gellner, in the modern industrial world, the "low or folk variant can be and is disavowed, as a corruption, exploited if not actually invented or instigated by the alien colonialist enemy, while the high variant becomes the culture around which a new nationalism can crystallise".<sup>27</sup>

Islam, however, Gellner tells us, "was internally divided into a high and low culture, the two flowing into each other, of course, and intimately related and intertwined, but also periodically erupting into conflict",<sup>28</sup> although not fundamentally altering society. Folk Islam was tribal, and thus "sub-ethnic and sub-political", centred on mysticism, saints, shrines and what Gellner describes as the low-culture variant of Islam. The cities of the imperial court and the formal mosques and the formal clergy ('ulama) are the high-culture variant of Islam and, when modernization occurs in Islamic society, the disavowing process which marks an important point in Gellner's theory does occur within Islamic society and the orthodox practices of high-culture Islam are adopted

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.59–60. Here Gellner writes, "A characteristic scenario of the evolution of a nationalism", which follows the contours of his particular theory.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

with ease, not producing the fissures and tensions created elsewhere. Because of the dualism within Islam where the high culture and low culture “flow into each other”, Islam for Gellner is much better equipped for dealing with reform; indeed, Gellner portrays Islam as “ever Reformation-prone (Islam could indeed be described as Permanent Reformation)”.<sup>29</sup>

There are two main criticisms of Gellner’s theoretical approach to nations and nationalism that I will focus on here. The first is that it is not easily applied to the numerous societies that experienced nationalism without experiencing the unquestionably dislocating processes of modernisation and industrialisation. Peter van der Veer remarks that:

*when one abandons the necessity of direct connection between a particular modern state formation and nationalism, this opens up a realm of possible forms of nationalism, one of which not only delinks nationalism from state formation but also from modernity itself.*<sup>30</sup>

This approach is particularly fruitful when considering case studies that did not experience the process of modernization Gellner lays out. In Egypt over the nineteenth century, state formation, which in fact meant greater state centralization, did not lead to modernity in the way Gellner describes. In fact, the state used its greater power and capacity to drive up agricultural production and make this more efficient. It introduced land reform in the countryside to limit the power of large land-owning elites and gave peasants greater opportunity to own land and make greater profits, measures that did not induce a large demographic shift from rural to urban but, on the contrary, rewarded those who remained in the countryside on the land.<sup>31</sup> Education, so central a feature of Gellner’s theory, hardly changed in Egypt between 1805 and 1879, remaining overwhelmingly Islamic in nature and far from being able to generate the highly skilled

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.79.

<sup>30</sup> Peter van der Veer, ‘Nationalism and Religion’ in John Breuilly (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013, p.656. I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. John Hutchinson for sending this chapter to me in Cairo and to Professor John Breuilly for allowing me to read it just before its publication.

<sup>31</sup> Gabriel Baer, *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, pp. 17–29, 62–78; see also Gabriel Baer, *A History of Land Ownership in Egypt, 1800–1950*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962.

workforce of Gellner's modern industrial society. Where modern skills were needed, a handful of schools were established or bright students were sent abroad to complete their studies which, as I will show later in this thesis, often had a far greater impact on the emergence of nationalism. Indeed very modest attempts were made at industrialisation during this period<sup>32</sup> and so, while some aspects of state modernization occurred, these were not targeted at building the type of society Gellner sees as critical for the emergence of nationalism.

The second main criticism is that it attempts to tell only half the story of the emergence of nations and nationalism. Gellner's modernism stems from his concern with social processes that occur in society after the late eighteenth century and the French revolution, the starting point for him of the history of nationalism. The collision of culture, secularization, modernization and the effects of profound social transformation with great shifts of people moving from rural to the new urban centres are the overriding features that concern Gellner. These are the aspects leading to the rise of nationalism that for him answer the question of why and how nationalism emerges. But, as Gellner takes his theory one step further and sets out what happens to those 'Ruritanian' new urban dwellers at the universities where they learn their new skills, are then exploited in the new industrial age and are influenced by "the foreign ... ethnographers, musicologists and historians",<sup>33</sup> he pays little attention to the aspects of group identity that these new soon-to-be-nationalists coalesce around. Interpretations of history, group identity markers that had existed in the pre-modern communities before the onset of modernity and historical attachments to territory, cultural traditions including language and religion are the features that resonate and around which nationalist movements form. These historical aspects become important in shaping, forming and indeed defining the nationalist struggle and the nation that comes into existence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Baer, op. cit., *Social History of Modern Egypt*, pp.212–13; here Baer states that over the nineteenth century, "Egypt was not transformed from an agrarian into an industrial society".

<sup>33</sup> Gellner, op. cit. *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 59–60.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000; see also p.xi of the Foreword by Yosef Kaplan.



Despite Gellner's modernism and his insistence on processes and social transformation in the modern era giving rise to nationalism, the importance he attaches to histories appears insignificant, at least on the surface of his work. Rogers Brubaker argues that "[r]eligion is less obviously central to Gellner's theory of nationalism [than language]".<sup>35</sup> This point is particularly true of Gellner's view, outlined above on Islam and its relationship to nationalism. While Gellner may argue that the idea of community in the form of the 'umma is incompatible with the nation, his theory and views on Islam's ability to reform itself and adapt to modernization illustrate a different view. Because of the dominance in Islam of the 'scripturalist, egalitarian high culture aspect of Islam' and the ability of the mystical low-culture variant to relate and be disavowed by its high-culture counterpart, Islam becomes crucial in ensuring that the high-culture remains unchallenged by the low-culture during modernization and reformation. Indeed, Brubaker argues that "culture and communication"<sup>36</sup> play a far more important role in Gellner's theory than language, and religion as an element of culture also becomes more central to his theory.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Brubaker argues that according to Gellner's theory, the high culture of Islam is "deeply compatible with nationalism and indeed often fused with nationalism".<sup>38</sup>

At the centre of the ever-increasing literature and interest in nationalism studies is the prominence of nationalist struggles and conflicts witnessed around the world, with the nation and its ideology showing the ability to mobilise people to sacrifice their lives in the name or defence of the nation. Many theorists, while recognising the power of nationalist ideology in mobilising the masses, are also sceptical of nationalism. Elie Kedourie, both in his book entitled *Nationalism*<sup>39</sup> and his later introduction to

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<sup>35</sup> Rogers Brubaker, 'Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 19:1, 2013, p.2. I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. John Hutchinson for sending this article to me in Cairo.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000.

*Nationalism in Asia and Africa*,<sup>40</sup> puts forward this sceptical view of nationalism. He argues that it is “quite apparent that this ideological obsession could provide no remedy for the ills of alienation and oppression for which it purported to provide a cure”.<sup>41</sup> To highlight his point, Kedourie states that:

*a nationalist ideology is clearly not ipso facto a guarantee of prosperity or of good and honest government. Thirty years of FLN rule in Algeria, or the record of successive Iraqi, Syrian or Egyptian nationalist regimes ... are a few examples which may serve as an illustration.*<sup>42</sup>

As well as displaying his scepticism of nationalism as an ideology, Kedourie is concerned with the origins of nationalism and, for him, these origins can be found in the Kantian notion of the “good will, which is the free will, [being] also the autonomous will”.<sup>43</sup> Put simply, if men were to be obedient to that which makes them free, it should not come from any external force in the shape of a divine command but from man himself. To be ‘good’, man must be free and freedom comes not from divine will but from an autonomous will – a will that conjures up freedom within itself free of external pressure. While the Kantian notion sees the individual acting independently, the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte was, according to Kedourie, “the Kantian doctrine properly understood”.<sup>44</sup> Fichte argued in *The Foundations of Natural Law* that “the individual cannot be considered on his own. He forms part of, and derives meaning from the whole”.<sup>45</sup> Here Fichte sees a relationship between state and individual where the state is an “artistic institution and its purpose is culture. Culture is the process whereby man becomes really man, realizing himself in utmost plenitude, and it is this realization which is the perfect freedom”.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, Fichte’s notion of freedom is intricately tied to the notion of a community with a shared culture.

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<sup>40</sup> Elie Kedourie (ed.) *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971.

<sup>41</sup> Kedourie, op. cit. *Nationalism*, p.xvi.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.xvii.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp.26–27.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.31.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp.30–31.

For Kedourie, the emergence and appeal of nationalism points to religion no longer taking centre stage in social organization or as offering salvation but being overtaken by politics as the engine by which 'salvation' can be achieved. Fichte's doctrine of the culture state and the individual's place within the whole are merged with Herder's doctrines arguing the existence of natural language differences within humanity which then make the "nation a homogeneous linguistic mass which acts as a magnet for groups speaking the same language outside its boundaries".<sup>47</sup> Kedourie sees this process emerging in Europe where politics replaces religion but retains the aspect of salvation so powerful in religion, making nationalism a millennial movement asserting that salvation can be achieved only through membership of the nation.

These same ideas appear in Asia and Africa but utilise religion in a more explicit way. In his lengthy introduction to *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, Kedourie shows how "religion and its venerable sacraments and familiar hymns can be used to mobilize the masses for political ends".<sup>48</sup> Religion is a crucial resource for nationalist mobilization in that "nationalists can utilize the powerful and tenacious loyalties which a faith held in common for centuries creates".<sup>49</sup> Kedourie recognizes the durability and indeed flexibility of religion, which enables it to lend itself to nationalism even when those religions "have nothing to do with nationalist theory, and which may even be opposed to it".<sup>50</sup> It is this tendency of nationalism, and indeed religion and more specifically Islam, that Kedourie brings to our attention.

However, the emphasis for Kedourie is the manipulation of popular religion in order to shape the political project of the nation. Kedourie argues that central to the nation is a 'past' and in the Islamic world, the past chronicled in the Quran, Hadith, other texts and in the sermons of religious leaders. Similarly, Kedourie cites the Arab

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>48</sup> Kedourie, op. cit. *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, p.74.

<sup>49</sup> Kedourie, op. cit. *Nationalism*, p.71.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.71. Kedourie is correct to argue here that "in the doctrine of Pakistan, Islam is transformed into a political ideology and used in order to mobilize Muslims against Hindus". He continues, arguing that religious "loyalties can be utilized even when they are not explicitly spoken of. There is little doubt that the appeal of modern Egyptian, pan-Arab, or Armenian, or Greek nationalism derives the greater part of its strength from the existence of ancient communal and religious ties."

nationalist Shakib Arslan (1869–1946) who in turn employs and urges Arabs to emulate the Zionist example where “the Bible becomes a product of the Jewish national genius and useful in fostering and perpetuating this genius”.<sup>51</sup> This reproduction of history “comes to be seen as that which gives coherence and significance to actions, documents, institutions which had hitherto been accepted as forming an uncomplicated and perhaps timeless tradition”.<sup>52</sup> Timeless though it may be, the actions of prophets, the holy texts of the Quran and Hadith are seen as a “store of lessons and warnings illustrating the workings of God’s justice”.<sup>53</sup> And when, as in Islam, ‘God’s justice’ is first pronounced by an Arab, to Arabs and in the language of the Arabs, this has important ramifications for ‘national’ identity and nation building.

First, according to Kedourie, from being confined to his religious importance, the Prophet Muhammad is transformed into a ‘national’ Arab hero. Muhammad, who has been chosen as the first and faithful recipients of God’s word, becomes the embodiment of the Arab nation. As the link between God and His people, Muhammad becomes the hero of the Arab people for it is his pristine character and being that have been chosen as the messenger of God’s Words. Battles fought by Muhammad in early Islamic history are seen in terms of his status as national hero for, without Muhammad, these battles would not have been won. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad is seen as hero for guiding and directing ‘his’ people to truth and glory and in order to fulfil their destiny as God’s chosen people. Second, Kedourie links Islam to Arabism and argues that “Islam begins to be regarded by Muslims not so much a Revelation and an immutable truth [but] as a ‘civilisation,’ a ‘culture’ or even a product of the Arab national genius”.<sup>54</sup> Kedourie tells us that this is nothing new – “Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have proved equally pliable and adaptable to political uses”.<sup>55</sup> Of course, religion must mean something particular to the community and in the case of Islam,

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<sup>51</sup> Kedourie, op. cit. *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, p.69.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.68.

Kedourie argues, that it was seen as a “manifestation of the Arab genius ... and represented the ascent of Arabism towards unity, power and progress”.<sup>56</sup>

Kedourie's emphasis is much more on ideas than Gellner's analysis of sociological processes and indeed necessity. Kedourie, while a modernist in the sense that he accepts the emergence of nations and nationalism in the modern era, does, however, see religion and older communal ties as crucial to nationalists and the formation of nation-states. Nationalism and ideology play an altogether more active role for Kedourie and religion is infused into both, even though its role is perhaps implicit at times. As the role of ideology and religion are paramount, so too is the extent to which these are manipulated. The manipulation of religion for political ends is demonstrated by Kedourie when he argues that in the third chapter of Exodus, when Moses goes to investigate the burning bush, “this shook Moses to the depth of his being [and] is now [the burning bush] symbolized by a sculpture standing at the gate of the Chamber of Deputies in Jerusalem: the noumenal has been degraded into the political”.<sup>57</sup> Similar examples are numerous when looking at Islam and its nationalist manipulation in the Middle East and wider Islamic world. The ‘national’ flag of Saudi Arabia is inscribed in Arabic with the fundamental and primary Muslim proclamation *shahaadah* (declaration): “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, many of the flags of Islamic states have the star and crescent emblem on them, which is one of the most potent and easily recognisable symbols of Islam. Muslim holy sites like the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Karbala, Mecca and Medina are imbued with fervent political significance, which has meant that their possession and indeed protection have become explicitly ‘national’ political issues. According to Kedourie, then, religion is important to nationalists because it engenders a “feeling of solidarity

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp.68–69.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.69.

<sup>58</sup> To ‘bear witness’ to this statement is the first condition placed on every Muslim, the Arabic being *laa 'ilaha illa 'llah Muhammadur-rasulu 'llah*.

and community which is essential if they are to be made to look upon themselves as a nation”.<sup>59</sup>

The departure point for Kedourie in his analysis of nationalism is the emphasis he places and the central position he accords medieval Christian millennialism and its religious drive for salvation. Kedourie believes that the “millennial hope is of the inauguration and institution of a totally new order where love reigns and all men are brothers, where all distinctions and divisions, all selfishness and self-regard are abolished”.<sup>60</sup> For him, the origins of millennialism are to be found in the Book of Revelation when it talks of the coming millennium in terms such as “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (20:6)” or “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth (21:1)”.<sup>61</sup>

In the post-Enlightenment era and the advent of nationalism however, the religious aspect of millennialism was lost and nationalism took up the mantle and became what Kedourie terms a ‘secular millennialism’. Kedourie further argues that, while nationalism retained the zeal and fanaticism of earlier millennial movements, it substituted the theological basis with a ‘rational’ one – nationalism – the political drive for national salvation. Through the process of colonial expansion and indeed subjugation, Asia and Africa became exposed and then influenced by the ideas of this secular millennialism where the “vision of a purified society in which all things are made new ... and the hope that men can somehow put an end to all oppression and injustice was immediately attractive”.<sup>62</sup>

The parallels Kedourie draws between the Christian millennialist tradition and that of modern nationalism can indeed be given some credence. However, his application of this parallel to the Islamic world is not so convincing. The explicitly Christian element

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<sup>59</sup> Kedourie, op. cit. *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, p.69.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.105.

to medieval millennialism has to a large extent been transposed by the particular metaphysics of nationalism. Nationalisms in the Islamic world, however, still have the religious aspect at the centre of their metaphysical structure. Islam has not been replaced by a secular tradition merely retaining the earlier zeal. It is the explicitly Islamic nature of the nationalism that gives it such power and passion. The second point worth mentioning here is that Kedourie's theory relies too heavily on elites either in the religious sphere or the sphere of the state manipulating popular consciousness. It pays none or very little attention to an approach that sees nationalism as a two-way process of popular mass mobilisation as well as elite manipulation. Popular discontent and the mass mobilisation, such as those experienced in Algeria and India against the imperial powers, were equally responsible for the success of those anti-colonial independence struggles. Similarly, the abuse and ignorance of Islamic customs and traditions in Iran were in part responsible for the Islamic/nationalist revolution there in 1979.

### **The Ethno-Symbolic Approach**

Anthony D. Smith<sup>63</sup> is the major proponent of this approach to analysing the emergence of nations and nationalism. He claims that "historical ethno-symbolism emerges from the theoretical critique of modernist approaches, as well as a different reading of the historical record".<sup>64</sup> For Smith, modernist theories "fail to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch, thereby precluding any understanding of the popular roots and widespread appeal of nationalism".<sup>65</sup> The contention is that most nations are formed around an ethnic core which Smith calls *ethnie* or ethnic community. The defining elements of an *ethnie* according to Smith is that it is a "named human population with

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<sup>63</sup> Anthony D. Smith has published extensively on the subject of the emergence of nations and nationalism but for the purposes of this review, I will focus on only a few of his more recent publications. In my opinion these give a good overall view of his critique of alternative approaches to nations and nationalism and a detailed account of his own theory. Furthermore, these writings include a broad range of the case studies he employs to illuminate not only his critiques but, in his opinion, the strengths and indeed imperatives of an ethno-symbolic approach to the study of nations and nationalism.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture, including an association with a homeland, and some degree of solidarity, at least among the elites”.<sup>66</sup>

The ethnic traits of communities have provided the cultural resources around which most modern nations are formed. The argument continues that the historical genealogies of these traits are fundamental if we are to realise not only the reasons for the emergence of nations and nationalism but also the powerful mobilising capabilities of nationalism. Smith argues that “for ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions and symbols of ethnic heritage and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias”. He continues that “it is from these elements of myth, memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its members cope with new challenges”.<sup>67</sup>

For Smith, an important component of the ethnic past is religion and here he agrees with Kedourie when he argues that “religion is rarely divorced from particular ethnic traditions”.<sup>68</sup> However, because of Smith’s contention that nations are formed around an ethnic core, he identifies an important continuity where ‘pre-modern’ religious traditions become linked with ethnic groups and, later, modern nations. Thus he argues that “religious traditions, and especially beliefs about the sacred, underpin and suffuse to a greater or lesser degree the national identities of populations”.<sup>69</sup>

Although there is some agreement between Kedourie and Smith with regard to the importance of religion, Smith differs markedly in that he does not argue that its introduction is in the shape of a ‘secularizing political religion’. On the contrary,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.13 (italics in original).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.9 (italics in original).

<sup>68</sup> Anthony D. Smith, ‘The Sacred Dimension of Nationalism’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 29:3, 2000, p.796.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.795.



Smith demonstrates the ways in which religion is transformed and becomes politicized, using the same myths, memories, traditions and examples of the past for present day 'national political' purposes. Concerning the Islamic Middle East, he argues that "traditional prophets and sages like Moses [and] Muhammad ... are metamorphosed into national heroes, while religious revelations are turned into national shrines such as Mecca ... and holy scriptures like the Koran ... are reinterpreted as national epics".<sup>70</sup> Smith's ethno-symbolic approach argues that the continuities over time and space of groups of people is important for the study of nations and nationalism because it is these enduring traits that become the central tenets of the nation and the defining features of the nationalist movement. A comparable approach was examined above in the theories of John Armstrong in his *Nations Before Nationalism* but, crucially, Smith is concerned (where Armstrong is not) with revealing the mechanisms for the emergence of modern nations.

For my specific purpose of looking at the relationship between Islam and nationalism, this approach is instructive because my contention is that many of the features of the emergence of Egyptian nationalism in the nineteenth century were indeed based on Egypt's Islamic identity, which had endured over long periods of time. Moreover, the actual nationalist movement in Egypt in the years 1879–1882 explicitly used and employed Islamic traditions, teachings and narratives to define a large element of its own politico-cultural struggle. Fundamental to the emergence of nationalism in Egypt was the powerful institution of the 'ulama. The 'ulama's central importance in Islamic societies derived from their religio-legal and pedagogical role, which allowed them to be the sole interpreters of Islamic sacred texts and narratives of the example of the Prophet Muhammad.

In interpreting these key narratives, 'ulama act as intermediaries between the people and the texts and amassed great moral authority both amongst rulers and ruled. Their elite position, and near monopoly on religious matters and texts, enabled them to take on a political role legitimizing regimes and political movements. In the case of Egypt, when the native nationalist movement emerged and looked to incorporate Islamic

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.799.

motifs into their conceptions of Egyptian nationalism, the ‘ulama became an important constituency and were able to articulate authoritatively the ways in which Islam could be reconciled with – and indeed was a central feature of – the Egyptian nation. According to ethno-symbolist approaches to nations and nationalism, the ‘ulama, through their religious roles, possess the cultural resources of the nation’s past by interpreting and indeed embodying the myths, narratives, and examples of a glorious and righteous past and ensuring the resonance of these features within the modern nation. Equally, in Gellner’s theory as explained above, the ‘ulama have a vital role as those within the high-culture variant of Islam who legitimize it in the face of challenges from its low-culture variant.

### **Islam and Nationalism in Comparative Perspective**

If scholars of nationalism have not fully recognised the importance and indeed the contribution that Islam makes towards nationalism in the Arab Middle East, the same cannot be said of scholars of the region. Historiographical accounts of nationalisms across the region, have long since explored the precise nature and ways in which Islam lends itself to the nationalist cause and have focused on particular cases of nationalism from country cases to the broader case of Arab nationalism drawing a varied set of conclusions. In this section, I explore some of these accounts by region scholars, highlighting the ways in which these are instructive for my own research in the linkages as well as the incompatibilities they put forward between Arabism, Ottomanism, Islam and nationalism.

The vast literature on the subject of Arab nationalism has developed despite the fact that according to Rashid Khalidi, “its decline as a political force”<sup>71</sup> owes much to “the growing significance of nation-state nationalism and the re-emergence of Islamic ideologies in the Middle East”.<sup>72</sup> Khalidi offers a summary definition of Arab nationalism as “the idea that the Arabs are a people linked by special bonds of language and history (and, some would add, religion), and that their political organisation should

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<sup>71</sup> Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih and Reeva S. Simon (eds), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p.vii of introduction.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.vii.

in some way reflect this reality”.<sup>73</sup> Khalidi’s words in brackets are perhaps the most important given that the place of religion has in many ways been one of the most contentious issue regarding the origins and nature of Arab nationalism.

For many years the most authoritative text on the subject of Arab nationalism was George Antonius’ “The Arab Awakening”,<sup>74</sup> which argued that the beginnings of Arab nationalism could be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century and the activities of a literary and scientific society composed mainly of Christian Arabs who had been schooled and were a product of the Christian schools in Beirut established by Christian missionaries.<sup>75</sup> The view Antonius put forward in his insistence of this version of the origins of Arab nationalism was that it was largely secular and liberal in its origins and in fact a response to “tyrannical Ottoman rule that catalysed this nationalist awakening”.<sup>76</sup>

Historiographical accounts from the 1960’s and 70, disagreed with the liberal, secular and mainly Christian antecedents of Arab nationalism that Antonius put forward. The critiques of this version argued that in fact Islam had played a central role in the development of Arab consciousness and identity.<sup>77</sup> It is important to underline that scholars drew a distinction between Arabism and Arab nationalism which is often not clear in their writings as they use Arabism and Arab nationalism interchangeably. I take both to be distinct concepts in their work. Arabism denotes a consciousness that developed very much from the mid-nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth century that considered Arabs as a distinct and superior people within the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.vii (author’s brackets and words in brackets).

<sup>74</sup> George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement*, Safety Harbour, FL, Simon Publications, 2001.

<sup>75</sup> Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908 – 1918*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, p.6

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>77</sup> These scholars include Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; Zeine N. Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism with a Background Study of Arab-Turkish Relations in the Near East*, Delmar NY, Caravan Books, 1973; C. Ernest Dawn. *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1973.

Islamic 'umma and was the precursor to the political movement of Arab nationalism which emerged in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat in 1918 and the collapse of the Empire. C. Ernest Dawn agrees with the location of Arab nationalism from 1918<sup>78</sup> and the Ottoman defeat and he sees the emergence of Arab nationalism as the culmination of increased contact with the West and with the idea of nationality, nationhood and their prevalence as political principles. Making the distinction I believe between Arabism and Arab nationalism, Dawn argues that "by the end of the nineteenth century, a few Ottoman Arab intellectuals put forward theories which denied the right of Turks to rule Arabs."<sup>79</sup> Dawn continues, the ideology of Arabism was created and after nearly a millennium, "Arab national consciousness was reactivated."<sup>80</sup> In fact, contrary to Antonius, Dawn and many of the scholars writing in the 60's and 70s including Albert Hourani, Sylvia Haim and Zeine N. Zeine saw Islam as a central feature of Arabism and in particular Dawn and others argued that this "new Arabism was an outgrowth of 'Abduh's Islamic modernism and revivalism".<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, Muhammad Abduh showed considerable partiality towards Arab Islam. Abduh argued that Islam while under the leadership of the Arabs, had expanded and been worthy of emulation by the West while Islam under the Turks, had declined and lost its past glory. In a passage from his *Islam wa 'l-nasraniyya* (Islam and Christianity)<sup>82</sup> Abduh declares that the decline of Islam can be traced to the time when the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim (d.842), suspecting the loyalty of the Arab troops of his household, made use of Turkish and Dailamite mercenaries who later inaugurated

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<sup>78</sup> C. Ernest Dawn, op. cit, *From Ottomanism to Arabism*, p.122

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.123

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p.123.

<sup>81</sup> C.Ernest Dawn, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, in Khalidi et al (eds), Op. cit, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, p.8

<sup>82</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh. *Al-Islam wa 'l-Nasraniyya* (Islam and Christianity), 5<sup>th</sup> ed.; Cairo, 1938, p.112

a military despotism.” Abduh continues that “under these barbarians, the intellectual civilisation of Islam withered and wilted.”<sup>83</sup>

Dawn’s theory is unquestionably located among those region scholars who see the rise of Arabism in the nineteenth century, importantly during the time of the Ottoman Empire as the precursor of Arab nationalism. This process for Dawn occurred as a result of three important factors. First, the idea of ‘nationhood’ and patriotism reached the Arabs via the Ottoman Empire and its increased contact with the West. Second, the observation and indeed promotion of these ideas by the Ottomans as prescriptions for progress. And finally, the realisation of Muslim decline. Thus Dawn argues that “the theory of Arab nationalism grew out of the modernist diagnosis of Muslim decline and prescription for Muslim revival.”<sup>84</sup> Ethnic politics, for Dawn, played little or no part in the formation of Arabism. As he argues, “[t]he ethnic sentiment of the Arabs is of little help as a clue, for despite the obvious value of Arabist theory in bolstering Arab pride, most Arabs remained Ottomanists until 1918.”<sup>85</sup>

Sylvia Haim<sup>86</sup>, draws similar conclusions regarding the origins of Arab nationalism. She argues that Ottomanism and the collapse of the Empire, coupled with the decline of Islam was sufficient cause for nationalism to enter the realm of politics in the Islamic Middle East. However, in the introduction to her anthology, there appears to be more of an emphasis placed on Islamic scholars seeing Arabism and Islam as having a unique and special bond. Thus her introduction has a common theme running through it where she sees Arabs of all religious affiliation placing Islam at the centre of the rise of Arab consciousness and the later Arab nationalist cause. From Muhammad Abduh through to Michel Aflaq, the Syrian Christian founder of the Ba ‘ath Party, the ‘greatness’ of the Arabs is attributed to Islam.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.112–113. See also the chapter entitled “*al-jumud ‘illa tazul*” (Stagnation Is a Passing Illness”)pp132-140.

<sup>84</sup> C. Ernest Dawn. op cit. *From Ottomanism to Arabism*, p.140

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p.147.

<sup>86</sup> Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962.

While Islam represents a significant component of Arabism for Sylvia Haim, she is careful to point out that this by no means made Islamic modernist scholars into outright Arab nationalists struggling against Ottoman rule. Muhammad Abduh's partiality to Arab Islam is noted by Haim but she argues that this "did not betoken an interest in or encouragement of Arab nationalism."<sup>87</sup> 'Abduh and other Arab Islamic scholars may have shown a partiality towards Arab Islam but this must be seen in light of their attempts to revitalise Islam and reinstate its former glories and arrest what they saw as its decline relative to the West but not in the desire to replace the Ottoman Empire. Both Dawn's and Haim's assertion on the distinction between Arabism, Ottomanism and Islamic modernism remain correct some three decades later. Hasan Kayali notes that "Islamic modernism was formulated as a response to imperialist encroachments and as such stressed Islamic unity against Europe. Therefore, while Islamic modernist ideas led to enhanced Arab consciousness, this consciousness did not translate into a political agenda that undermined the legitimacy of the Ottoman state."<sup>88</sup>

For Islamic modernist scholars, Arabism for them meant the Arab peoples being the 'chosen people' by Allah as the peoples to bring Islam to the world and for the holiest of Prophets to have come from the Arab people. Likewise, the fact that the language of the Revelation was Arabic, pointed to them to the fact that the language of Allah was also that of the Arab people. In these respects, Arabism was to them the belief and indeed the insistence that Arabs occupied a unique and primary position among Muslims and that only Arab leadership of the universal 'umma of Muslims would once again enable Islam to flourish as it had done in its 'golden age'.

It is this consciousness of Arab identity that Dawn talks about, which emerged in the mid to late nineteenth century and that led to the emergence of the ideology of Arab nationalism in the early twentieth century after the Ottoman defeat. The notion of Arab superiority and the idea of a 'chosen people' central to John Armstrong's theory of the existence of nations before nationalism where genealogical myths of descent are often those elements around which nations coalesce, is noticeably relevant to the case

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>88</sup> Hasan Kayali, op.cit. *Arabs and Young Turks*, p.7

of Arabism and later articulations of Arab nationalism that assert Arab-Islamic identity. But if Ottoman Arab Islamic modernist scholars conceptualised their position within the 'umma as superior in relation to Turks and other non-Arab Ottomans, this did not mean that they wished to see an end to the Ottoman Empire. Prior to the British Occupation of Egypt in 1882 and from 1879, I argue that Egyptian 'ulama both modernists and some conservatives had an Arabist and Ottomanist tendency which saw the Arabs as superior but they also recognised the importance of the Ottoman Empire as the structure that was the guarantor of the 'umma which both Arab and non-Arab 'ulama were determined to retain. Khalidi asserts the same point when he argues "Arabists could also be believers in the Ottoman ideal, and before World War 1 most were".<sup>89</sup>

On the distinction between Arabism and Arab nationalism, some scholars have ascribed Eric Hobsbawm's notion of "protonationalism" as a useful analytical tool by which to view this earlier 'phases' of Arab nationalism. But the concept of protonationalism which according to Hobsbawm, must have as its basis "belonging to a lasting political entity"<sup>90</sup> remains unclear. Is Hobsbawm referring to the bonds and markers around which group identity is formed and which, in the age of nationalism go on to be important in the formation of nations or does he mean a defined 'national' political entity that is somehow the first basis of a political movement that later goes on to be a nationalist movement seeking a state for itself? On the first possibility of what Hobsbawm may mean by the concept of "proto-national," Anthony Smith shows that Hobsbawm himself rejects this because in Hobsbawm's insistence of the modernity of nations and nationalism, he argues that "these proto-national" bonds are irrelevant to the subsequent modern political movement of nationalism."<sup>91</sup> On the second possibility of the meaning of "proto-national", the distinction between a national political entity and a nationalist movement is blurred given that there is broad multi-perspective agreement among scholars of nations and nationalism on the definition of

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<sup>89</sup> Rashid Khalidi et al (eds), op. cit, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, p.ix

<sup>90</sup> Kayali, op. cit. *Arabs and Young Turks*, p.9; see also, Hobsbawm, op. cit. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, pp.46-79.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, op. cit. *The Nation in History*, p.33.

nationalism as the nation's political ideology. In the case of Arabism, Hasan Kayali rightly points out that "Arabism...nourished political agendas that fit in with broader imperial patterns of political contestation, though it did not engender a coherent exclusionary or separatist Arab nationalist program."<sup>92</sup> As a modernist historian of nationalism, Hobsbawm, uses the idea of protonationalism to account for the importance of historical bonds and ties and older ethnic identities which do become important to later nationalist movements. But as a modernist, the "proto" phase in his analysis, which distinguishes between being a political entity and having a statist agenda, is an analytical category of the rise of nationalism whose usefulness, apart from reconciling modernist theories of nationalism with the acceptance of pre-modern ties and bonds, is questionable.<sup>93</sup>

Nikkie Keddie also uses the term protonationalism in her essay where she looks at the idea of pan-Islam as being a protonationalist phase. Writing in the late 1960s, she contends that throughout the Muslim world, there has been a "transfer of popular loyalty...from a primary identification with Islam to one with the modern nation".<sup>94</sup> For Keddie, the emergence of nationalism in the Muslim world went through an important phase where pan-Islamic loyalty was somehow a protonational phase and she argues that from its "heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, [pan-Islam] was an important step in the transition from Islamic to national loyalties".<sup>95</sup> This heyday and the strength of pan-Islamic feeling was for Keddie very much linked to the encroachments of Western and Russian imperial powers in the Islamic world. Although the Ottoman Sultan's claim to be the Caliph were premised on dubious grounds on account of him not being of Arab descent, he was nevertheless

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<sup>92</sup> Kayali, op. cit. *Arabs and Young Turks*, p.11.

<sup>93</sup> John Breuilly, *Eric Hobsbawm: Nationalism and Revolution*, forthcoming in *Nations and Nationalism*, 2015. I am grateful to John Breuilly for sharing this article with me before publication and to John Hutchinson for facilitating this and for his comments and discussions on Eric Hobsbawm's idea of protonationalism.

<sup>94</sup> Nikkie R Keddie, *Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism*, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 41, No. 1, March 1969, p.17.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p.18.



“the most powerful remaining Muslim ruler”,<sup>96</sup> and requests for his assistance came from Muslims in India and throughout Central Asia.

As well as a strong anti-imperialist dimension to greater calls for Islamic unity and pan-Islamism which Keddie rightly associates with tendencies of many nationalist movements, the emphasis of her argument where she sees important elements of pan-Islamism as analogous to modern nationalist movements involves “aggressive cultural defensiveness...[and] a call for the revival of the best features of a distant past”.<sup>97</sup> Pan-Islamism does this by proclaiming the superiority of Muslims to others including most importantly within an anti-imperialist context, the Christian West and by recalling the ‘golden age’ of Islam as an era to be emulated by Muslims in the present and future. These features of pan-Islamism, Keddie identifies in the thought and writings of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani who she calls “the leading ideological representative of the Pan-Islamic trend in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>98</sup>

The elements of Pan-Islamism Keddie highlights are clearly analogous to nationalist movements and she rightly identifies the importance of history and historical group attachment, ideas of cultural uniqueness and “golden ages” and anti-imperialism as being common features of many nationalist movements. These were also noticeable elements within the thought of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani but while these are analogous, Keddie never demonstrates adequately, whether the view is that pan-Islamism represents the first stage of nationalism or is the precursor to nationalism? Furthermore, it is unclear what sort of nationalism emerges from Pan-Islamism. Would it be the individual nationalisms that emerged after the Ottoman defeat or is it the precursor to the broader Pan-Arab movement and its concomitant Arab nationalist movement? Indeed, was Pan-Islamism a necessary pre-condition to nationalism in the Muslim world or did nationalisms simply adopt some of the elements of Pan-Islamism

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 24-25

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.21.

which they thought would be useful and relevant characteristics of their own movement?

On the case of Egypt, Keddie points out that “Egyptian nationalists, who prior to 1882 had begun to speak of “Egypt for the Egyptians,” [after 1882 and British Occupation] became increasingly loyal to the Ottoman Sultan as the best feasible alternative to, and protection against, continued British Occupation.”<sup>99</sup> She singles out Egypt’s relationship with the Ottoman Empire prior to 1882 as one where nationalism had already taken root but reverted back to Ottoman loyalty after its defeat by the British invasion of Egypt. This view supports my argument which sees Pan-Islamic loyalties, in the Egyptian case, as existing side by side with the desire to be politically and nationally independent. Pan-Islamism does not appear to be a prototype of nationalism neither does it seem to be a precursor to nationalism. On the contrary, it existed alongside nationalism merged into the discourse of nationalist politics and provided elements to Egypt’s nationalist movement which for them represented powerful features of an Egyptian national identity and consciousness. It is, as a final remark on Keddie’s article, worth pointing out that she concentrates on the work and thought of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and shows how he “was able to switch back and forth from appeals to a single nation to appeals to the entire Islamic community without feeling any apparent contradiction.”<sup>100</sup> While I agree with this perspective and indeed the compatibility of Islam and nationalism, Keddie demonstrates this on the basis of research on one religious scholar whereas my own research, attempts to make a similar case for Egypt by looking at a number of ‘ulama and their writings and debates.

William L. Cleveland, assigns an equally important role in the Pan-Islamic movement to the Lebanese Druze writer, activist, politician and diplomat Amir Shakib Arslan (1869-1946),<sup>101</sup> as Keddie does to al-Afghani. Arslan met al-Afghani and later, according to Cleveland, “began a sustained personal relationship with the Egyptian

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p.22.

<sup>101</sup> William L. Cleveland, *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism*, London, Al-Saqi Books, 1985, p.iii.

reformer Muhammad ‘Abduh.”<sup>102</sup> The relationship with ‘Abduh and the example of al-Afghani, coupled with Arslan’s own experience of European penetration of Islamic territories in Egypt (1882), Algeria (1830), Tunisia (1881), Morocco (1912) and Libya (1911) and the prospect of a declining and diminishing Ottoman Empire sustaining losses of Ottoman territory in the Balkans, were decisive influences in making him into a “dedicated exponent of Islamic solidarity and an uncompromising Ottoman loyalist.”<sup>103</sup> Like al-Afghani, Arslan saw the importance of Pan-Islamism and Islamic solidarity as the best response to European dominance of Islamic territories and he saw the Ottoman Empire as being the best vehicle by which to forge this Islamic unity.

Cleveland notes that “Ottomanism is a difficult concept to define, but it was basically an attempt to generate feelings of Ottoman patriotism which could be embraced by all the subject peoples of the multinational Empire.”<sup>104</sup> Arslan’s Ottomanism was primarily based on his desire for Islamic unity and he saw the Ottoman Empire as a politico-religious community attaching to it religious importance for Muslims but also seeing its political purpose as a political unit for Muslim territories. In contrast to al-Afghani’s Pan-Islamism which saw no contradiction between appealing for Islamic unity at the ‘national’ or the Ottoman Pan-Islamic level, Arslan, prior to the Ottoman defeat in 1918 vehemently rejected the “nationalist organisation of society”<sup>105</sup> and was critical of Arab separatist trends within the Empire. For the purposes of this thesis, contrasting the views of the likes of al-Afghani, Arslan and ‘Abduh demonstrates what Dawn saw as the “the fluidity of opinions possible between the poles of his “ideal types of Ottomanism and Arabism”<sup>106</sup> The fluidity that Dawn suggests meant that Arabism, Ottomanism and indeed nationalism could conceivably and often did overlap as facets of identity and loyalty. So for instance, while ‘Abduh’s Arabism is striking – the idea that Arabs held a primary and superior bond with Islam – this did not necessarily conflict with his desire, in the years 1881 and 1882 where he was part of

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. xvii.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.xvii.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.xvi.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.xvii

<sup>106</sup> Rashid Khalidi et al (eds), op. cit, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, p.ix

the nationalist movement in Egypt, to see the continuation of the Ottoman Empire as the overarching structure of the Muslim 'umma. Even for a staunch anti-nationalist like Arslan, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and his failed attempts to revive it, Arslan became reconciled with the various 'national' attempts that emerged to resist French and British mandate rule. Cleveland tells us that he became "an integral part of the Syro-Lebanese conflict with France, an actor in the Palestinian drama...mentor of a group of Moroccan nationalists...[and] involved with leading Algerian and Tunisian personalities."<sup>107</sup>

The emergence of Arabism within the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century illustrates the ways in which Arab consciousness and identity for many were closely linked to Islam. With the exception, I argue of the Egyptian nationalist revolt of 1879-1882, Arab populations by and large did not display nationalist tendencies in terms of concerted efforts at achieving political independence from the Ottoman state.<sup>108</sup> Arabism emerged during the nineteenth century, linked as it was to an historical understanding of the unique links to Islam that the Arabs possessed. This view, held by Arabs and many Ottoman Turks alike, considered the Arab people and the Arabic language as Allah's preferred means of transmitting and disseminating Islam to the world. However, despite Arabism becoming increasingly popular and emergent by the late nineteenth century, Ottomanism, with its association with the rule of the Sultan/Caliph as head of the Muslim 'umma, who had expended considerable efforts in increasing his Islamic credentials as a way of encouraging the loyalty of his remaining, mainly Arab populated domains, remained the main institution to which Ottoman Arabs aligned themselves with. At the political level, most Ottoman Arabs, with the exception of Egypt from around late 1881, considered the Ottoman Empire as the best option for protection against European imperialism but also, scholars including Albert Hourani and Hasan Kayali argue that "there were no lines of exclusion which kept the Arabs out of the Ottoman state and society."<sup>109</sup> In addition,

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<sup>107</sup> Cleveland, op. cit. *Islam Against the West*, p. xix.

<sup>108</sup> Kayali, op. cit. *Arabs and Young Turks*, p.13.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 7

Hasan Kayali found that Arab Deputies in the first Ottoman Chamber of Deputies “were some of the most vocal, and often critical” with some Arab provinces under represented like Basra, Baghdad and Tripoli (Libya), while others like Aleppo and Syria were overrepresented.<sup>110</sup>

My focus in this section so far on Arabism rather than Arab nationalism is premised on the fact that many scholars agree that Arab nationalism emerged in the aftermath of the Ottoman defeat which lies outside the scope of this study in terms of the period of study. However, what much of the literature on Arab nationalism does show is the way in which Islam was intimately connected to the emergence of Arabism in the nineteenth century and a distinct Arab identity and consciousness which many scholars believe was the precursor and foundational basis of later expressions of Arab nationalism which emerged when the overarching structure of the Ottoman state had finally been disbanded in the early 1920s. Islam made an important contribution to the meaning and basis of Arabism and Arab consciousness. The Egyptian case of 1879-1882 is important but unique in that I argue this was a nationalist movement during the time of the Ottoman Empire where many Ottoman Arabs remained loyal to the Ottoman Sultan. The crucial point here is that Egyptian pro-nationalist ‘ulama – both reformist and conservative – joined forces with ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement to press for political independence while at the same time asserting their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and Sultan as an integral member of the ‘umma. In this way, they sought to draw a distinction between Egypt’s Islamic ties and membership of the Muslim ‘umma on the one hand, and on the other its right to political independence and national sovereignty based on its own distinct national consciousness.

But if scholars have demonstrated the importance and role of Islam in the rise of Arabism in the nineteenth century and how Pan-Islamism can show very similar traits to nationalist movements, some scholars have also looked at the question of Islam’s role in the making of Egyptian national identity and “nationality.” Two works in particular deserve some attention here. The first is Michael Gasper’s book which “traces the emergence of modern Egyptian identity from the last third of the nineteenth

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, pp.25-26

century to the first quarter of the twentieth century.”<sup>111</sup> Gasper focuses on the emergence of two important social groups – the new urban intelligentsia and the Islamic modernist movement and shows how through their depictions and views of Egypt’s majority peasant population, they were able to forge a new Egyptian identity. Importantly, Gasper ties religion and in particular “the burgeoning Islamic modernist movement to the process of identity formation...[and] shows how religion became an integral part of modern Egyptian political, social and cultural life.”<sup>112</sup>

The assumption by Gasper that religion was at some point not an integral part of these elements of modern Egyptian life, leads one to question Gasper’s base assumption. Yaseen Noorani, in contrast argues that “to understand the nature and logic of modern normative concepts, it is necessary to trace their emergence from pre-existing norms and to focus on what it means, in both cases, for individuals and societies to be ordered.”<sup>113</sup> Noorani, like Gasper is concerned not so much with nationalism as he is with the idea and underlying normative structure of the logic of nationality. He states that his aims are to explore the “nature of nationality as a moral ideal” and also to look at how this new moral ideal relates to older ones “already present in literate Arabic culture.”<sup>114</sup> The focal point of Gasper’s enquiry is to explore the shifts, influences and transformations of Egyptian national identity within the context of an emerging urban intelligentsia and Islamic modernism which was, at the end of the nineteenth century a prominent intellectual force in Egypt. Gasper points out that “the construction of modern Egyptian identity was a political and social project. The ideal of Egyptian-ness embodied in the figure of the civilised, urban, and literate sophisticate was not a mood, a trope, an image, or an intellectual development; rather it was a claim to political authority on the part of a rising social formation.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Michael Ezekiel Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants and Islam in Egypt*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> Yaseen Noorani, *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 209

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>115</sup> Gasper, op. cit. *The Power of Representation*, p.2

Noorani's complex schema looks at the abstract relationship between desire and order both on an individual and communal level and argues that order is maintained in the "premodern Arabic intellectual tradition" by the ideal of virtue.<sup>116</sup> Premodern communal order is maintained by virtuous figures, who for Noorani are those few people who have mastered and been able to control their individual desires through reason and adherence to divine commandments who are then able to command social and political authority. In contrast, Noorani suggests that "the representation of nationality, however, alters the relationship between desire and order by transferring the locus of communal order from virtuous figures of authority to the national body as a whole."<sup>117</sup> The nation and therefore the ideal of nationality becomes the moral repository of communal order and while individual desire remains prone to deviation and acts of 'chaos', the ideal of nationality channels and regulates this propensity in the modern period. But the nation – a moral community – must define itself and Noorani explains that "[a]rt, particularly literary art, takes up the task of representing an innate human nature that is initially, and thus inherently outside of moral order but yet gives rise to it."<sup>118</sup> In this respect, Noorani explores the literary, reformist and political writings of four authors spanning the periodization of his book from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. What these authors put forward are various social and moral commentaries of the community, its ills and strategies for moral as well as social transformation and change. In these accounts, Noorani argues that each author reveals different conditions and criteria depicting an integrated national community which provoked the formulation of a varied set of remedies which did not rely solely on liberal secular ideals but often made use of an older set of beliefs and concepts which were integrated into and applied by these authors to create the moral, social and political parameters and content of communal order which they saw as being embodied in the ideal of nationality and in the nation.

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<sup>116</sup> Noorani, op. cit. *Culture and Hegemony*, p.9

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

The analysis of Sami al-Barudi's poetry in particular, a leading figure in the 'Urabi movement, reveals no mention of Islam and the role that it plays perhaps not overtly, but in some of al-Barudi's depictions of a moral order. Tyranny, enslavement, individual moral corruption are all themes and messages that Noorani explains are within the content of the poems. If these were all themes and ideas that were constituent parts of formulating a communal order and a new normative framework and were an attempt to make use of pre-modern moral ideals to forge a modern moral order and community, how would these themes have been interpreted by a society where Islam was a major contributor to moral values – both individual and communal – and remained so into the modern period? The ideal of nationality that Noorani wishes to explore is pertinent and important given the transformation in the nature of communal loyalty from pre-modern attachments and communal bonds to those of the nation in the modern era. However, Noorani takes us on a mostly abstract journey “to sketch a genealogy of modern moral and social ideals” without exploring the social and moral attachments that individuals and Egyptian society would have had in the nineteenth century and how these might have changed given a new set of institutions and ideals aimed at transferring authority from virtuous figures of authority to a national body. In other ways though, Noorani's work is important in that it forces us to look at normative frameworks of society and moral ideals which define society and the ways in which these are transformed not by wholesale replacement by new ideals and values but very much part of a continuing process, where a “putative logic of social development can efface existing concepts and values and produce the concepts and values it requires directly out of itself.”<sup>119</sup> Echoing this approach, my own work seeks to locate and illuminate some of the continuities between conceptions of community in the 'umma and how, in particular the 'ulama, made sense of these in an age of nationalism and were able to articulate continuity with older notions of communal identity.

Gasper's approach is to “tell the story of Egypt's nascent middle classes – a protobourgeoisie made up of teachers, engineers, doctors, journalists and lawyers –

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p.210



crafting a new kind of social, political and moral outlook that neatly complemented their own political aspirations.”<sup>120</sup> These aspirations, Gasper tells us were linked to putting forward a “gendered, classed and “civilized” subject...as the primary agent in Egypt’s social and political life.”<sup>121</sup> This new middle class used the depiction of the peasants, first as a social group that needed radical change and development if they were to be part of the new vision for Egypt which was to rid itself from foreign domination and to increase agricultural production. Then as the “timeless repository of Egyptian-ness,”<sup>122</sup> a depiction that they linked themselves to in order to lend greater authority and authenticity to their own class interests.

Gasper sees the Islamic modernist movement as an integral actor in these debates in the respect that Islamic modernists were at the forefront of debates about the ills of foreign domination and the need for Islamic unity to dispel European encroachment in Egypt. In chapter four of this thesis, I argue that the debates within ‘ulama circles around issues related to the interpretation of legal and sacred texts were not confined to religious debates but intimately linked to wider reform issues such as educational reform and legal reform and the nature of the political and cultural identity of Egypt. Gasper makes a similar point when he remarks that the “ramifications of this project reach beyond a narrow discussion of Islamic jurisprudence or ritual, for the ethos of Islamic reform left a very distinct impression on the emergent social formation of the ‘afandiya.”<sup>123</sup>

In this thesis however, and in terms of offering a critique of Gasper’s work, I attempt to focus not only on the Islamic modernist movement in showing how Islam was important to nation building and indeed nationalism in the years 1879-1882, but in showing some of the debates that occurred between reformist and conservative clerics on the issue of nationalism and in particular the events of the ‘Urabi revolt. In contrast, Gasper focuses on the Islamic modernists but these debates were occurring in many

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<sup>120</sup> Gasper, op. cit. *The Power of Representation*, p.5

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p.5

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p.39.

circles in the mosques and *madaaris* up and down the country. Furthermore, both Gasper and Noorani miss the relevance of the 'Urabi revolt in bringing these issues and debates to the fore and into public debate. However, Gasper's work is important in showing how the emergent urban elite and the Islamic modernists were together involved in debating the kind of society, in the modern period they wished Egypt to become. The role of Islam was important in this respect because even the urban elite were aware of the cultural and social importance of Islam to society.

### **Prelude to Nationalism: Egypt During the Nineteenth Century**

Scholarly analysis of the events leading up to and including the 'Urabi Revolt appear broadly as three distinct sets of literature. First, there exists a substantial body of literature on the general history of Egypt in the nineteenth century. Secondly, there exists a modest body of writings that looks specifically at the Revolt of 1879–1882 drawing on a variety of sources from English, Arabic, French and Turkish.<sup>124</sup> Lastly, there is a number of memoirs and commentaries written by Egyptians and Europeans describing the events prior to and during the revolt years. The Egyptian accounts were mainly written by Egyptian protagonists of the Revolt such as Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh and Ahmed 'Urabi himself and others who were close to the events or the people leading the events. The European accounts are by the British officials resident in Egypt at the time or European travellers who demonstrated a fascination with Egypt and the political demands it was making at the time. These include the invaluable account by W. S. Blunt.<sup>125</sup> My research has drawn substantially on all of these sets of

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<sup>124</sup> See Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-political Crisis in Egypt, 1878–1882*, London, Ithaca Press, 1981; Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993; Jacques Berque, *Egypt, Imperialism and Revolution* (translated by Jean Stewart), London, Faber & Faber, 1972; Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *al-Thawra al-'Urabi w'al-Ihtilaal al-Ingalizi (The 'Urabi Revolt and British Occupation)*, Cairo, al-Nahda Publishing House, 1937. See also Robert L. Tignor, 'Some Materials for the History of the 'Arabi Revolution', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 16:2, 1962, pp.239–48.

<sup>125</sup> Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1907. The accuracy and therefore value of this account depends on the proximity of the author to the political actors of the time. Blunt is valuable because he had considerable access to and influence over some of the highest British Government officials of the time including the British Prime Minister William Gladstone and Britain's Foreign Secretary Lord Granville and was close to and supported 'Urabi and the Nationalists and their cause for national independence.

literature and I will below set out some of the limits and main criticisms I have of the general literature.

In his history of Egypt from Muhammad ‘Ali to Sadat, P. J. Vatikiotis<sup>126</sup> pays little attention to the ‘Urabi Revolt of 1879–1882 compared to other periods and events covered in his book. After discussing the rise of Muhammad ‘Ali and the social, economic and political transformation of Egypt during the nineteenth century, he concludes that:

*political developments in the period 1866–82 cannot ... be fully appreciated outside the context of the educational and cultural advances of the same period, or outside the context of the financial difficulties which brought European control over the Khedival government.*<sup>127</sup>

Vatikiotis is referring to the rapid transformation which impacted on many spheres of Egyptian society in this period and which began with Muhammad ‘Ali’s rise to power. Along with greater levels of autonomy for Egypt from the Ottoman Empire came other socio-economic and cultural changes, which transformed Egypt. Arabic replaced Turkish as the official state language in the 1860s<sup>128</sup> and Egypt increasingly looked towards Europe for trade and finance. Attempts to centralize and develop the state along modern bureaucratic lines were made and the educational sphere in Egypt was widened: non-religious subjects became increasingly available within the new civil school system. Although in Gellnerian terms, industrialisation<sup>129</sup> and its implications for nationalism did not occur until much later, during the middle of the next century, the massive transformation Egypt experienced during the nineteenth century did introduce profound political changes which, according to Vatikiotis “for the first time

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<sup>126</sup> See P.J. Vatikiotis, *History of Egypt: from Muhammad Ali to Mubarak*, London, Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1980.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.127.

<sup>128</sup> On the Arabic language and national identity, see Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2003. See in particular the chapter on Egyptian nationalism.

<sup>129</sup> Baer, op. cit. *Social History of Modern Egypt*, p.212.

produced a local opposition to the Khedive”<sup>130</sup> and led to the emergence of the ‘Urabi movement between 1879–1882.

The account of events during the reign of Khedive Isma’il (r.1863–1879) is broadly similar in this and other books and Vatikiotis argues, like many others, that the political crisis was brought about by the pressures put on Egypt through its debt crisis, European domination, local resentment over Turco-Circassian elitism and the increasing powers of the constitutional movement, which was able to oppose the Khedive through the newly formed *Majlis Shura al-Nuwwab* (Consultative Assembly, or Council of Deputies) in 1866.<sup>131</sup> Egypt’s debt crisis placed enormous strain on the population, with both the *fellahin* (peasants) and the urban lower middle classes aggressively taxed in order to service the state’s debt payments to the European powers who had lent most of the money for Egypt’s regeneration from the 1860s onwards.<sup>132</sup>

These same class groups had, by the end of the nineteenth century, faced almost a century of tough economic measures. From the latter part of the eighteenth century, they were taxed aggressively, this time in order to ensure the tribute was paid to the Ottoman Sultan to retain the autonomy Egypt had carved out and enjoyed from the Sublime Porte.<sup>133</sup> In the political realm, Vatikiotis emphasises the role of the constitutional movement, which he says was dominated by the Turco-Circassian elites, and argues that, by paving the way for constitutional change and allowing opposition to his rule – albeit in a limited sense – Khedive Isma’il “opened a Pandora’s Box from which emerged the first Egyptian rebels”.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Vatikiotis, op. cit. *History of Egypt*, pp.127–28.

<sup>131</sup> Jacob Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, Tel Aviv, Israel Publishing House, 1953, pp. 8–9.

<sup>132</sup> J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt, 1798–1952: Her Advance Towards a Modern Identity*, London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977, pp. 118–19.

<sup>133</sup> Afaf Lutfi al Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad ‘Ali*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984; see also Michael Winter, *Egypt Under Ottoman Rule, 1517–1798*, London, Routledge, 1992.

<sup>134</sup> Vatikiotis, op. cit. *History of Egypt*, p.129.

However, measuring the achievements of the constitutional movement in Egypt, it becomes apparent that the movement was in fact largely unsuccessful. The *Majlis Shura al-Nuwwab* lacked real powers, a fact confirmed by Ahmad Shafique in his memoirs when he commented that the *Majlis Shura al-Nuwwab* was established so that Khedive Isma'il could appear to his European benefactors as a "constitutional monarch, permitting some public participation in power, to avoid the charge of absolutism".<sup>135</sup>

Further, many historians of Egypt have questioned the motives and achievements of the constitutional movement while others have disagreed with the dominant view that sees the movement as exclusively Turco-Circassian in ethnic origin. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod offers an interesting perspective arguing that:

*[b]y 1879 they [the constitutionalists] appeared to have achieved a good measure of success in their endeavour, but the emptiness of their victory became apparent immediately after their triumph when they were confronted with the nascent power of the alien European elite.*<sup>136</sup>

Indeed, the weakness of the constitutional movement appears glaringly obvious when we see their record in government. For instance, Muhammad Sharif Pasha, leader of the constitutionalists and a member of the Turco-Circassian nobility, assumed the role of Prime Minister of Egypt on two occasions before the British invasion of Egypt in 1882 and both times his government was short lived, lasting no more than five months.<sup>137</sup>

The inherent weakness of the constitutional movement may be explained in two ways. In the first instance, most scholars view the old Turco-Circassian nobility as

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<sup>135</sup> Ahmed Shafique, *Mudhakkirati fi nisf qarn (My memoirs over half a century)*, 2 vols., Cairo, 1934–36, Vol. II., p.29. This quotation also appears in Vatikiotis, op. cit. *History of Egypt*, p.130. For a more detailed discussion and analysis of the development of constitutional politics in Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century see Landau, op. cit. *Parliaments and Parties*.

<sup>136</sup> Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 'The Transformation of the Egyptian Elite: Prelude to the 'Urabi Revolt', *Middle East Journal*, 1967, Vol. 21:3, p.326 (my comments in brackets).

<sup>137</sup> Muhammad Sharif Pasha's third term as Prime Minister lasted for a longer period, from August 1882 to January 1884. His first term was from April to August 1879 and his second term, instigated by Ahmad 'Urabi after the 'Abdin Palace incident, and one of 'Urabi's demands, was from September 1881 to February 1882.

representing the bulk of the constitutional movement. Prior to Isma'il's forced abdication in 1879, they were able to secure a range of constitutional changes and looked to be the major opposition group checking Khedival rule.<sup>138</sup> However, after the accession of Isma'il's son Tawfiq to the Khedival throne, the situation changed and the constitutionalists were overtaken by 'Urabi's nationalist movement. The constitutionalists were widely seen as a narrow elite movement seeking to bolster only their own political capital in an attempt to protect and further their own economic class interests. In this way, the constitutionalists were seen as representing only the narrow interests of the Turco-Circassian nobility and not the vast bulk of the Egyptian people.

Secondly, being Turco-Circassian, they were seen as ethnically different from the vast majority of native Egyptians. The Ottoman Empire had implicitly approved of the favouritism Khedive Isma'il had shown the Turco-Circassians by acquiescing to their promotions over and above those awarded to native Egyptians within government ministries and the Egyptian army. So, ostensibly because of their ethnic background and their privileged positions within Egyptian society, they were seen as an extension of Ottoman and Khedival rule and consequently unable to attract popular support.

However, Abu-Lughod's analysis of the transformation of the Egyptian elite during the nineteenth century disagrees with the standard view of Turco-Circassian ethnic exclusivity. He argues that the ethnic composition and character of this group had been transformed dramatically over the course of the nineteenth century and the Turco-Circassian constitutionalists were now, in the main, "identical with the indigenous population except in prestige".<sup>139</sup> According to Abu-Lughod, after coming to power, Muhammad 'Ali set about dispersing and diluting those social groups that represented a threat to his monopoly on power. At the apex of society were the governing elites, exclusively Turco-Circassian in origin and firmly dominating the social, economic and political spheres of society.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Landau, op. cit. *Parliaments and Parties*, pp.16–27.

<sup>139</sup> Abu-Lughod, op. cit. 'Transformation of the Egyptian Elite', p.334.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.327.

At this point, this elite social group were mainly concentrated in Cairo but after Muhammad ‘Ali’s rise to power and his determination to remove potential threats to his own rule, he forced them to abandon their positions in Cairo and to retreat to the countryside where, in many cases, they possessed large parcels of land and were forced to “renounce their old occupations and begin to build a new pattern of life”.<sup>141</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, the old Turco-Circassian elites assimilated into life in the countryside and the social networks of the rural communities. They married into native Egyptian families – ethnic differences being put aside in the face of religious affinities – and lost many of the features of their specific Turco-Circassian identity including everyday use of the Turkish language in favour of Arabic. Likewise, with each generation, the Turco-Circassian ethnic identity became more and more obscure until by the 1870s, according to Abu-Lughod, it “had lost its meaning”.<sup>142</sup>

It is uncertain whether Turco-Circassian identity entirely lost its meaning. What we can be certain of, however, is that Turco-Circassian ethnic identity had changed significantly over the course of the nineteenth century and its perception amongst native Egyptians also changed over this time. From accepting them as the landed elite nobility at the beginning of the nineteenth century, native Egyptians had changed their attitudes towards the Turco-Circassian elite by the last quarter of the century and were much less prepared to accept their prestigious status.

However, while most scholarly opinion is in agreement over the constitutional movement being overtaken by ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement from 1879 onwards, none of the scholars have attributed this weakness to the constitutional movement’s largely secular nature. Muhammad Sharif Pasha’s constitutional movement was in no way a religious movement and insofar as it was ‘nationalist’, it never made any attempt to incorporate Islam or indeed other features of Egyptian national identity into its specific nationalist discourse. Vatikiotis is uncertain “whether Sharif could have attracted the ‘ulama, landowners and other elements in the Assembly ... to his camp

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.332.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.334.

away from the Orabists”.<sup>143</sup> However, the point is that he did not and, more important, he made very little attempt to do so. The constitutional movement made no religious appeal and possessed very narrow ‘nationalist’ aims that centred almost entirely around limiting the role of the Khedive, increasing the powers of the Assembly and assuming a more prominent role in negotiations with the European powers in trying to repay the country’s debts.<sup>144</sup> Without questioning the importance of these aims, it is important to underline that they were not only elite driven but, more important, their appeal was pitched at the elite level without ever rousing the imagination and sentiments of the masses.

In contrast, ‘Urabi’s movement had a much broader national appeal because it was seen as a movement headed by Egyptians for Egyptians. Initially, it emerged as a protest movement against the favouritism shown to Turco-Circassian military officers over their native Egyptian counterparts.<sup>145</sup> This has led a number of scholars to view the protest as driven by ethnic difference between Turco-Circassians and native Egyptians.<sup>146</sup> This perspective fails to account for the fact that ‘Urabi himself was responsible for insisting that Muhammad Sharif Pasha – a Turco-Circassian – assume the role of Prime Minister and form the government after the first major standoff between ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement and Khedive Tawfiq in September 1881. ‘Urabi’s own social origins and those of his fellow army officers were from humble rural backgrounds with which many Egyptians could easily and readily identify.<sup>147</sup> As well as possessing native Egyptian origins and a modest social status, an important ingredient of ‘Urabi’s appeal was his ability to portray his national struggle as one that also sought to re-establish Egypt’s Islamic identity and heritage, as I will show in later

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<sup>143</sup> Vatikiotis, op. cit. *History of Egypt*, p.148.

<sup>144</sup> Schölch, op.cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*.

<sup>145</sup> Berque, op. cit. *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, p.113; see also Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, pp.136–37 and p.153.

<sup>146</sup> Berque, op. cit. *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution*, p.113.

<sup>147</sup> Ahmed ‘Urabi, *Mudhakhirat al-Za’im Ahmed ‘Urabi: Kashf al-Setar ‘An Ser al-Asrar fi al-Nahda al-Misriyya al-Mashhora bil-Thawra al-‘Urabiyya* (*The Diaries of the Leader Ahmed Urabi: Unveiling the Secret of all Secrets on the Egyptian Renaissance Known as the Urabi Revolution*) (Studied and edited by Dr ‘Abd al-Mon’im Ibrahim al-Gami’i), 3 vols., Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, 2005, Vol. 1, pp.90–94.



chapters. For many Egyptians, the years of European domination had brought unprecedented levels of economic hardship but also a deep sense of cultural and religious alienation that ‘Urabi, with his native Egyptian background and the emphasis he placed on Egypt’s Islamic identity, promised to address.<sup>148</sup>

It is one of the major contentions of this thesis that there is a lack of analysis of the role of the ‘ulama in the ‘Urabi Revolt and one of my aims is to address this deficiency in the literature on this subject. Given the importance of the ‘ulama and their role as guardians of the faith and the most authoritative voices in Islam, by ignoring to a large extent the role of ‘ulama, scholars have also failed to address and appreciate the Islamic dimension of the ‘Urabi Revolt. Although initially ‘Urabi’s protest movement sought to reinstate the rights and status of native Egyptian army officers in the military, as the movement gathered strength and evolved into a wider national movement that increasingly addressed broader national issues, ‘Urabi linked these to Egypt’s Islamic identity and portrayed nationalist concerns as being crucial to the protection of Egypt’s Islamic identity and heritage.

In this endeavour, his most valuable constituency were the Egyptian ‘ulama – who by no means displayed a common position towards ‘Urabi and his nationalist movement. In fact, the ‘ulama remained divided and uncertain of their positions, with some deciding to side with the Khedive, others rejecting ‘Urabi’s growing popularity and opposition to the Khedive and his ever increasing claims for national independence from both the Khedive and the Ottoman Sultan. However, it is also true that many supported ‘Urabi and, while some scholars have recognised this,<sup>149</sup> there has been no attempt in the literature on the ‘Urabi Revolt to focus on this group and to explain their complex positions in relation to the emergence of Egyptian nationalism and the ‘Urabi Revolt. Given the central importance of Islam to Egyptian society in the late nineteenth century, and the ‘ulama’s religious and moral prominence, the absence of analysis of these features of the Revolt constitutes a major weakness in our

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. p.295.

<sup>149</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*; Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*; al-Rafi’i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-‘Urabi*.

understanding of the event itself and the ways in which Islam constituted a central component to the nationalist movement.

### The 'Urabi Revolt, 1879–1882

Apart from the coverage given to the 'Urabi Revolt in the more general literature which looks at nineteenth century Egyptian history, two books, by Juan Cole<sup>150</sup> and Alexander Schölch,<sup>151</sup> that explore in greater detail the particular events of the Revolt have been for a long time the most authoritative texts in the field. Other works on the 'Urabi Revolt (*al-Thawra al-'Urabi*) in Arabic by scholars like Latifah Salim<sup>152</sup> and the prolific early twentieth century writer Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i<sup>153</sup> are either too descriptive or have a far too rigid class analysis.<sup>154</sup> Despite these limiting features, these and other works by Arabic scholars offer substantial background to the subject and a valuable resource for checking, corroborating and providing starting points for researchers exploring the vast untapped and largely disorganised archives.<sup>155</sup> In contrast, both Cole's and Schölch's texts attempt to look closely at the nature of the 'Urabi movement and its underlying causes, although the two texts look at the events through very different prisms. Schölch's prism is essentially political and is a microscopic view of the unfolding political events between the years 1879 and 1882, while Cole's book is a socio-cultural analysis of the conditions under which the Revolt emerged. Cole's work attempts to combine sociological analysis, revolutionary theory

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<sup>150</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*.

<sup>151</sup> Schölch, op. cit., *Egypt for the Egyptians!*

<sup>152</sup> Latifah Salim, *al-Quwa al-Ijtima'iyya fi al-Thawra al-'Urabiyya (The Social Forces in the 'Urabi Revolt)*, Cairo, al-Hay'ah al-Misriyya, 1981.

<sup>153</sup> Al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*.

<sup>154</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, pp.16–20; see also Ehud R. Toledano, Review of Cole's book in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31:2, April 1995, pp.379–83.

<sup>155</sup> Haim Shaked, 'The Biographies of 'Ulama in 'Ali Mubarak's *Khitat* as a Source for the History of the 'Ulama in Nineteenth Century Egypt', *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 7, 1971, pp.41–76.

and actual events, much like Theda Skocpol's seminal work on the French, Russian Chinese and Iranian Revolutions.<sup>156</sup>

Schölch's analysis focuses almost entirely on the elites: those of a pro-Khedival nature within the Khedival government and the top military officials and those of the anti-Khedival perspective, the new emerging local elites from both the revolutionary 'Urabi camp and the gradualist constitutionalist camp of Muhammad Sharif Pasha. Criticising Schölch's book, Cole remarks that, "the social dimensions of the Revolution escape Schölch".<sup>157</sup> In contrast, Cole tries to counter-balance elite-driven analysis by introducing a genuine attempt at analysing wider social forces, bringing into the picture groups such as peasants, guilds and intellectuals, and considering the particular class interests of these groups. Indeed, he argues, "[e]conomic and demographic change and the growth of state power created new interests among the three strata that most participated later in the Revolution".<sup>158</sup>

Although the texts employ different analytical frameworks, there are significant points of agreement. Both agree, for instance, that the 'Urabi Revolt ended up being a convergence of social groups or forces, all with their own separate grievances against the Khedive and his government. Schölch terms these "autochthonous social groups"<sup>159</sup> to include army officers, lower ranked 'ulama and indigenous journalists, who, he argues "stood in the forefront of this struggle".<sup>160</sup> Similarly Cole draws roughly the same conclusion on the social groups participating in the revolt but extends the boundaries somewhat to include "the rural population, the urban guilds and the intelligentsia ... [who] were united by reference to a common enemy".<sup>161</sup> For both

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<sup>156</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; by the same author, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979; Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley, 1978.

<sup>157</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.17.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>159</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.136.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.314.

<sup>161</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, pp.21–22.

scholars, the common enemy or struggle was directed against the Khedive Isma'il and later in 1879, after Isma'il's abdication, his successor, Khedive Tawfiq. Grievances centred on over-taxation of the rural peasants and guilds, unequal treatment of Egyptian army officers in relation to their Turco-Circassian counterparts and, for the 'ulama, Schölch tells us that "as a social group, the 'ulama had not recovered from Muhammad 'Ali's blows economically and politically".<sup>162</sup> Cole also points towards the impact of "economic and social change in the 1860s and 1870s on the peasants, guilds and intellectuals".<sup>163</sup> These are significant claims that both authors make without critically examining the source or strength of such claims. Consequently, both authors follow the dominant paradigm that sees the 'ulama during this period losing their political power and influence. As a result, the full extent of and the complexities behind the 'ulama's role in the 'Urabi Revolt and the Revolt's Islamic dimension in large part escapes both authors.

On the role of Islam as a social force, both Cole and Schölch recognise this but in very limited ways. For Schölch, the Revolution's Islamic dimension is apparent, first, in the role of the 'ulama, where he says that in the pre-Revolutionary period, senior 'ulama such as "Sheikh al-Bakri and Sheikh al-Idwi were won over" to the nationalist cause and in fact Sheikh al-Idwi preached in mosques against Ryad Pasha and the European Ministries".<sup>164</sup> Both Cole and Schölch rightly draw attention to the *la'iha Wataniyya* (National Declaration or Manifesto) by the National Party on 2 April 1879. Reflecting their particular perspectives, Schölch argues that this was adopted in the presence of senior 'ulama like Sheikh al-Bakri, Sheikh al-Idwi and Sheikh Khalfawi,<sup>165</sup> while Cole argues that the "religious and military branches of the intelligentsia supplied nearly half of the signatures".<sup>166</sup> Their general remarks continue in this same manner. Cole, for instance, points towards the fact that "many of the Muslim high clergy or 'ulama ended up siding with the Khedive, though 'ulama did

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<sup>162</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.307.

<sup>163</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.53.

<sup>164</sup> Schölch, op. cit., *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.88.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.108.

form one branch of the revolutionary intelligentsia".<sup>167</sup> Both also agree that the emergence of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement created for the 'ulama a difficult and complex situation whereby they had to consider not only their relations with the Khedive but also those with the Ottoman Sultan and Egypt's position in the Islamic 'umma.<sup>168</sup>

While it is correct to point out the complexities in the 'ulama's position, both within the nationalist movement and in the anti-nationalist camp, neither author explores these considerations with enough depth. The 'ulama are just one social group of many that both authors are trying to cover and, as a result, treatment of the 'ulama and their views, opinions and positions in relation to the various political currents is only minimally and inadequately explored. In too general a way, both authors put 'ulama into simplistic binary positions almost entirely dependent on their official or non-official status or on the basis of presumed loyalties towards the Ottoman Sultan and by extension the Khedive.<sup>169</sup> In fact, the 'ulama displayed much more nuanced and complex positions in response to the changing political situation in the years 1879–1882 and the emergence of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement. Indeed, the pioneering work of more recent scholars like Indira Falk Gesink and Meir Hatina, analysing the 'ulama in the nineteenth century, has shown that some of the most conservative 'ulama were, contrary to the dominant paradigms in studies on the 'ulama, pro-nationalist and indeed were leaders and the most vociferous supporters of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.183. See also Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.313.

<sup>169</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.313. Here Schölch argues "not all 'ulama supported 'Urabi because they still believed in supporting Tawfiq who after all, had been placed there by the Sultan who was God's Caliph".

<sup>170</sup> Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, UT, University of Utah Press, 2010; see also, Indira Falk Gesink, *Beyond Modernism: Opposition and Negotiation in the Azhar Reform Movement, 1870-1911*, PhD thesis, Washington University, 2000; I. F. Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2010.

Given the importance of the 'Urabi Revolt as Egypt's first expression of nationalism while still being part of the Ottoman Empire with the Sultan widely recognised as being the head of the Islamic 'umma,<sup>171</sup> it is astonishing that there exists no dedicated study on the role of Islam and of the 'ulama in the 'Urabi Revolt. Cole and Schölch's work is a valuable initial analysis of the 'ulama's position but, as discussed above, falls short of being adequate in numerous ways. On the other hand, while Hatina provides a clear focused analysis of the 'Urabi Revolt and the role of the 'ulama, his departure points and main subjects of analyses are not the role of Islam in the emergence of Egyptian nationalism or the wider and more theoretical issue of the relationship of religion to nationalism. Gesink's work makes a significant contribution to studying the 'ulama and she argues that much of the attention of scholars of the 'ulama has been upon those modernist 'ulama such as Muhammad 'Abduh, resulting in a dominant narrative that sees conservative 'ulama as "opponents of reform and enemies of progress".<sup>172</sup> Her main focus is the reform of al-Azhar and educational reform debates in Egypt in the nineteenth century and, by showing that conservative 'ulama had significant contributions to make to these debates during this time, her analysis opens the door and shows how, even within the political sphere, both conservative and reformist 'ulama remained active and their political positions, while complex, did in some cases converge on important political issues.<sup>173</sup> Hatina shares this view but his main thesis is to re-assess the position of the 'ulama as my research does and to move away from another dominant narrative that sees the 'ulama being deposed throughout the nineteenth century from their traditional position of authority and political power. He agrees that, in the first part of the nineteenth century, 'ulama political and economic influence was removed but argues that "Muhammad 'Ali's reformist program ... failed to weaken their [the 'ulama's] status as the country's intellectual elite and the attractiveness of al-Azhar as an institution of religious learning".<sup>174</sup> While I agree with Hatina's point, my purpose is to demonstrate that, having retained many of their social

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<sup>171</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.27.

<sup>172</sup> Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, p.6.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pp.59–89; see also Chapter 4 of that book (Progress, Nationalism and the Negative Construction of Al-Azhar 'Ulama (1870–1882)).

<sup>174</sup> Hatina, op. cit. *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere*, p.31.

functions and protected their religious spheres and intellectual and moral dominance, the 'ulama used these resources to play an active role in the nationalist movement. From both an organisational and mobilising perspective, by urging people to support the movement and by giving the movement religious legitimacy and by providing intellectual weight to the movement, 'ulama were dominant and were at the core of Egyptian nationalism.

Both scholars provide a clear and compelling reassessment of the traditional and hitherto dominant work on the 'ulama and their reactions to modernisation in the nineteenth century by scholars such as Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot and Daniel Crecelius in the 1960s and 1970s whose overreliance on modernisation theory limited the theories and understandings of processes of secularisation and how these might be different in the Islamic world. Hatina makes the important point that secularisation in Egypt did not occur:

*in the sense of the separation of religion and state. Rather, it took the form of the penetration of the state into areas that traditionally had been under the control of the religious establishment such as the waqf (charitable endowment), the educational system and the judiciary.<sup>175</sup>*

On these fundamental questions, further research is needed to identify precisely the extent to which the state did in fact penetrate these traditional realms. In the next chapter I offer an alternative perspective on the ways the 'ulama reacted to reforms and address the nature of these reforms and how the government reforms may have failed to challenge many of the traditional realms of the 'ulama. Further clarification on these issues will provide a greater sense of the 'ulama's ability to resist state encroachment and retain popular influence and moral authority among the masses, significant factors that were retained through the nineteenth century and that were important features in the 'ulama's support of 'Urabi and the emerging nationalist movement.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p.29.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Changing Fortunes: The Rise and Fall of ‘Ulama Power?**

In Egypt, the ‘ulama had assumed a powerful political status by the beginning of the nineteenth century. During the period of Ottoman/Mamluk rule (1517–1798), characterised by Ottoman weakness and in-fighting between Mamluk tribes, the ‘ulama were able to take advantage of the uncertain situation and amass considerable wealth and political influence. By advising Mamluk leaders and mediating in their internal conflicts, ‘ulama were often rewarded with cultivatable land, urban property and lavish gifts.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, in advising Mamluk Beys, they also found themselves possessing considerable political influence by being at the centre of the political sphere. Even Napoleon recognised the ‘ulama’s importance and attempted to rule Egypt in collaboration with the ‘ulama in the hope that this would prevent widespread local opposition to his occupation of Egypt in 1798. But, while some ‘ulama supported Napoleon, others protested against French occupation and the ‘ulama quickly became one of the leading groups in anti-French demonstrations and protests with the mosque/university complex of Al-Azhar becoming the intellectual and political heart of anti-French sentiment.

The ‘ulama demonstrated their capacity to act independently and influence the political process when they defied the authority of the then Ottoman Vali (Governor) to help elevate Muhammad ‘Ali to power in 1801. Soon after Muhammad ‘Ali’s emergence, however, the ‘ulama’s political status began to decline and continued to wane steadily over the course of the nineteenth century. The ‘ulama became politically marginalised

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti ibn Hasan, *‘Aja’ib al-athar fi al-Tarajim wa al-Akhbar (The Most Wondrous Achievements: Biographies and Reports of Events)*, 3 vols. Cairo, Matba’at Dar al-Kutb al-Misriyya, 1997–98, Vol. III, p. 323. There are many versions of al-Jabarti’s famous work. Some publishers have reproduced the work in 3 volumes and others in 4 volumes and some publishers have also slightly rearranged the content. My research spans many years and so over the course of these years various copies were used both in London and in Cairo. I reference the relevant copy at the time of writing as it would be impossible to track all the changes in numerous publishers’ versions.



which many scholars consider to result from their loss of economic and financial privileges, a process initiated by Muhammad 'Ali himself.<sup>2</sup>

The 'ulama's prominence in opposing the French occupation of Egypt (1798–1801) and their central role in Muhammad 'Ali's elevation to power in Egypt from the Ottoman General in Egypt to Ottoman Governor (1801–1805) demonstrate the extent of their political influence at this point. Many scholars have argued that, in gradually losing their wealth and economic privileges over the course of the nineteenth century, the 'ulama were largely removed from the political decision-making process in Egypt. My contention is that, damaging as these measures were for the 'ulama's political role in society, the evidence suggests that their religious, pedagogical and religio-legal functions remained relatively undiminished. Thus, in a country where mass religiosity existed and where the 'ulama remained dominant in the religious, educational and legal spheres, they continued to be an important social group with considerable moral authority right up to the 'Urabi Revolt of 1881–1882.

### **Mamluk Egypt and the 'Ulama**

When the Ottoman Sultan Salim I conquered Mamluk Egypt in 1517, his loyal Janissaries were left in Egypt to check and balance the power of the Ottoman Vali. The defeated Mamluks were permitted to continue to participate in the running of Egypt only after pledging their allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan. They were appointed governors of various provinces or regions of Egypt and were accountable to the Ottoman Vali and ultimately the Sultan. This tripartite relationship between the Janissaries, the Vali and the Mamluk Beys was fraught with difficulties and eventually

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<sup>2</sup> Afaf Lufti al-Sayyid Marsot, 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt During the Early Nineteenth Century' in P. M. Holt (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt: Historical Studies from the Ottoman Conquest to the United Arab Republic*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968; Daniel Crecelius, 'Nonideological Responses of the Egyptian 'Ulama to Modernisation' in Nikki Keddie (ed.) *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500*, Berkeley, CA and London, University of California Press, 1978.

culminated in the “ascendancy of the Mamluk Beys so that by 1700, the Vali in Egypt was all but a pawn in their hands”.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Mamluks controlled and effectively governed Egypt, their system of rule and bitter infighting led to widespread conflict and lawlessness throughout Egypt and to great uncertainty and instability.<sup>4</sup> With the 'ulama already possessing considerable moral influence among the population and rulers alike, and their right to participate in matters of government already well established, even though some leading 'ulama vehemently rejected the 'ulama in political roles, they assumed the role of mediators and advisors to the warring Mamluks. Often, when contending Mamluk Beys could not settle differences and the infighting between them degenerated into open warfare, prominent 'ulama were called upon to mediate and decide on amicable solutions. In the words of al-Jabarti, an Al-Azhar 'alim, Sheikh and chronicler of the time, “the 'ulama were there to serve as intermediaries with the rulers”.<sup>5</sup> Al-Jabarti tells us further that the trust between Mamluks and 'ulama originated from the fact that many “Mamluks had been reared in the laps of the 'ulama, read the Quran, studied the Shari'a and went on the *Hajj*”.<sup>6</sup> This encouraged reverence and adoration for the 'ulama on the part of the Mamluks and an admiration and respect for their way of life and their wisdom.

The relationship between 'ulama and Mamluk Beys was by no means one-sided: prominent 'ulama also came to regard the Mamluks with considerable favour. Many 'ulama were dependent on the Mamluks for the wealth they had amassed and for their prominence within society. Moreover, 'ulama were:

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<sup>3</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad 'Ali to Mubarak*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991, p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Winter, *Egypt under Ottoman Rule 1517–1798*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> al-Jabarti, op. cit. *'Aja'ib*, Vol.1, p.187.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Vol. IV, p.49.

*dependent on Mamluks for their livelihood, they had attached themselves to Mamluk Houses and were given livings by them. They visited those Mamluks who had religious tendencies, or literary pretensions, they intermarried with them and some wealthy 'ulama even came to possess Mamluks of their own.*<sup>7</sup>

This role of the 'ulama as intermediaries between Mamluk factions had also enabled them to amass great wealth and they were often rewarded by various Mamluk Beys with tracts of land and urban property, which gave them an independent and, in many cases, sizeable source of income as *multazim* (tax farmers). The wealth of the 'ulama was not just vast but was, to a large extent, immune from taxation by the Ottoman authorities and Mamluk Beys.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that many 'ulama controlled and possessed vast amounts of rural cultivable lands, urban property and other sources of wealth has prompted many social historians of Egypt to see them as a distinct social class.<sup>9</sup> However, for all their wealth, they lacked military strength and a clear centralised leadership and organisation. Historically, the social structure of Islamic society was made up of two elite groups that held authority over the people. In the temporal realm, the Caliph and his military were 'the men of the sword' while the 'ulama in the spiritual realm were 'the men of the pen'.<sup>10</sup> If the authority of the Mamluks stemmed from their ability to exercise coercive force over the population, the "authority of the 'ulama stemmed from their use of moral and religious sanctions which, in a society dominated by religion and tradition was in fact formidable".<sup>11</sup> As a result of mainly three factors – the moral weight of the 'ulama in society, their largely independent economic power and status, and the role they had filled in mediating between Mamluk Beys – by the eighteenth

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt', p.265.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Baer, *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, p.8. The system of land ownership was called the *iltizam*, which allowed for the extraction of collective taxes due from a village and also agricultural production from the *fellah* (peasant) by the *multazim* (tax farmer). See also Gabriel Baer, *A History of Land Ownership in Egypt, 1800–1950*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt'; Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses'.

<sup>10</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses', p.184.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt', p.264.

century the 'ulama often braved "the displeasure of Pashas and Beys and were able to oppose the rulers with some measure of success and were even able to lead movements of opposition".<sup>12</sup>

By the late eighteenth century, Egypt was experiencing social unrest in both the villages and urban centres. The taxation demands of the Ottoman sultanate on the Mamluks meant that the latter were imposing extortionate taxes on the *fellahin* and the urban guilds in order to pay the tribute due to the Ottoman Sultan and keep him out of direct involvement in Egypt. Thus, the 'ulama were frequently called upon to keep the peace without the use of force. Al-Jabarti cites an incident in 1785 when:

*Ibrahim Bey, then Amir al-Hajj, made the rounds to the ulama, namely Shaykhs al-Bakri, al-Arusi and al-Dardir, requesting that they help him preserve the peace and prevent the populace from behaving in an unruly manner, and giving the Porte an excuse for intervention. Thus, if the Mamlukes respected the 'ulama and deferred to them, it was not only because of their religious upbringing, but because they knew that the ulama controlled the people and could rouse and restrain them.*<sup>13</sup>

The period from the late eighteenth to the early part of the nineteenth century is seen by many scholars as being the 'golden age' of the 'ulama in terms of their power, wealth and influence both on society and on the rulers. However, 'the 'ulama should not merely be seen as mediating in disputes and restraining public outcry and protest directed at the Mamluks and the Ottoman Sultanate. As stated above, they were often themselves the impetus behind popular mobilisation and protest aimed at the rulers; when the French invaded and occupied Egypt (1798–1801), it was the 'ulama who were a leading group in the uprisings and demonstrations against Napoleon and his army.

### **'Ulama, Al-Azhar and the French Occupation, 1798–1801**

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 met with very little Mamluk resistance. The decline of the Ottoman Empire had also set in and it was powerless to intervene to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.265.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Jabarti, op. cit. *'Aja'ib*, Vol. II, p.111; see also p.266.

defend its province. The occasion of Napoleon's invasion was "in effect, the beginning of the end of the centuries of 'ulama–Mamluk cooperation".<sup>14</sup> When news arrived of Napoleon's taking of Alexandria, the 'ulama heatedly accused the Mamluks of being the sole cause of Egypt's troubles.<sup>15</sup> With the Mamluks in disarray and utterly unprepared, Napoleon was able to occupy Egypt with very little resistance to his imperial forces. Napoleon knew, however, that military superiority would not be enough to sustain French rule in Egypt and quickly began enlisting the support of the 'ulama for he saw them as the 'natural leaders of native society'. Napoleon set out his reasons for wanting the cooperation of the 'ulama in ruling Egypt. He stated:

*I have preferred the ulama and the doctors of the law: first, because they are natural leaders; secondly, because they are interpreters of the Qur'an and the greatest obstacles we have met with and shall meet with proceed from religious ideas; and thirdly, these ulama have gentle manners, love justice and are rich and animated by good moral principles ... they are not addicted to any sort of military manoeuvring and they are ill adapted to the leadership of an armed movement.*<sup>16</sup>

Napoleon's plea to the 'ulama to "rule themselves" was accompanied by an invitation to them to occupy the places on the *Diwan* (Administrative Council) left vacant by the flight of the ruling elites. He knew of their role as intermediaries between contending Mamluk factions but, more important, Napoleon knew of their role as political legitimisers for the Mamluks. "Thus it came about that in composing his *Diwan*, Bonaparte filled it with 'ulama who were to help him legislate, maintain order and act as intermediary between the French authorities and the people."<sup>17</sup> He also gave the impression that the French had come to help the Egyptians achieve liberty, equality and fraternity within a Muslim context.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, 'The 'Ulama of Cairo in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in Nikki Keddie (ed.), *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500*, London, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1978, p.161.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.161.

<sup>16</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses', p.173.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt', p.270.

<sup>18</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses'.

For the 'ulama, being part of the *Diwan* was similar to their role under the Mamluks when they had also occupied seats in the *Diwan*. But now, "for the first time the ruling power in the country was making a show of governing in consultation with the 'ulama as representatives of the local will and the local weal".<sup>19</sup> Under the Mamluks, the *Diwan*'s importance as a governing body was minimal and its deliberations were never taken as seriously as the expression of popular feeling and anger out in the streets. Napoleon attempted to use the *Diwan* as an institution that would be responsive to the will of the people via the 'ulama. However, he also knew the capacity of the 'ulama to rouse and mobilise the masses against rulers and, by filling the seats of the *Diwan* with 'ulama, he hoped to curb this potential for revolt. Thus, with the French invasion, Bonaparte's revival of the *Diwan* and his wish for the 'ulama to take the seats of government, "the 'ulama came to see themselves, and be seen by the people, as occupying a greater position of authority than before".<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that Napoleon offered the 'ulama the chance to rule, many 'ulama grew increasingly angry at French rule and began to organise a series of revolts, which were ultimately to destabilise the French occupation of Egypt. During this period, 'ulama actively refused to cooperate with the French. Crecelius sees this as "an admission of their [the 'ulama's] inability to perform these vital functions themselves".<sup>21</sup> He further argues that "just as the ulama would brook no intrusion by others in their special field of religious interpretation and instruction, so they in turn could not presume to encroach upon the functions of the scribes, the military, or the rulers".<sup>22</sup> So, when the opportunity presented itself to cooperate with the French and exchange the traditional role of power brokers to that of power holders, they chose to

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<sup>19</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt', p.270.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.271.

<sup>21</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses', p.174.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.174.

turn their backs on this chance and pursue a course that would lead to the destruction of their power under Muhammad 'Ali.<sup>23</sup>

Many 'ulama opposed the French occupation and in numerous revolts against the French, the 'ulama were the impetus behind the popular mobilisations led by al-Azhar, the epicentre of the struggle, where people gathered to take instructions from the 'ulama. The first of the revolts was an abortive one that was led by Sheikh of the *riwaq* (dormitory) and the blind in al-Azhar<sup>24</sup> and ended with his execution alongside a number of other 'ulama, for their role in the insurgency. Another revolt took place in March 1800, which was led by Umar Makran, the Naqib al-Ashraf (Marshal of the Notables) at al-Azhar. Many other 'ulama were involved in the revolts including Sheikh al-Sadat, who was accused by Bonaparte of fomenting the first revolt. He was not punished for fear of popular reaction but was "implicated in the second revolt [of 1800], fined, imprisoned and beaten by the French".<sup>25</sup> As a result of this incident and the Sheikh's refusal to accept a position on the *Diwan*, his prestige and popularity grew enormously amongst the people, while the authority of those 'ulama who had befriended and accepted French rule diminished. As an example, "Sheikh al-Bakri who had befriended the French was deposed from his order after they had evacuated Egypt and his daughter was killed for consorting with the French".<sup>26</sup>

The revolts against the French illustrate clearly that many 'ulama, chose to oppose the French and their occupation of Egypt. Despite the reluctance of some leading 'ulama to participate in the revolts and their criticisms of the protests, the 'ulama were a leading group opposing the French. As a result, al-Azhar became the centre and heart of the resistance movement against the French. The revolts were often followed by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp.174, 175.

<sup>24</sup> al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'Ulama of Cairo', p.162.

<sup>25</sup> Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot 'The Beginnings of Modernization among the Rectors of al-Azhar, 1789–1870' in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds) *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968, p.271.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Jabarti, op. cit. 'Aja'ib, Vol. III, p.192.

severe French reprisals, which on occasion “meant the desecration of al-Azhar where troops entered with arms and with their boots on. The gap therefore grew wider between the occupiers and the ‘ulama; and the ‘ulama could not become receptive to French ideas”.<sup>27</sup> The ‘ulama saw the French occupation as much more than a politico-military crisis, it came to be seen as “a religiously alien and morally inferior force which was in temporary occupation of their land, so it was natural that their constant concern was for their liberation from the infidels”<sup>28</sup> rather than to comply with them in the enslavement of Muslims.

### **Muhammad ‘Ali and the ‘Ulama**

The evacuation of the French in July and August of 1801 heightened the chaos and anarchy in Egypt, with the Mamluks, Ottoman authorities and Janissaries fighting to fill the power vacuum left by the French. The economic and political situation continued to deteriorate when, in 1805, the ‘ulama resolved to try and bring an end to the suffering and chaos. The Sheikhs gathered to decide a course of action. During this time, Muhammad ‘Ali had been lobbying Umar Makram, Marshal of the Notables, promising that if the ‘ulama threw their weight behind his candidacy for Vali, he would do nothing without their consent. Muhammad ‘Ali, like many other rulers, knew that if he was to ascend to the position of Vali, he would need the good will and support of the ‘ulama.<sup>29</sup>

Having deliberated for days, the leading ‘ulama, that is, Sheikh al-Sadat, Umar Makram, Sheikh al-Sharqawi and other leaders of orders and Muftis, finally presented their concerns and a list of demands to the incumbent Ottoman Vali who, without any consideration of their concerns, refused to comply. For the ‘ulama, this was a clear sign that the Ottoman Vali had no intention of governing Egypt in accordance with the wishes of the people and the ‘ulama. Knowing that the Vali would refuse their demands, they made their way to Muhammad ‘Ali immediately where, al-Jabarti tells

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<sup>27</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. ‘Rectors of al-Azhar’, p.270.

<sup>28</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. ‘Nonideological Responses’, p.175.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Jabarti, op. cit. ‘*Aja’ib*, Vol. III, p.337.



us, "Sheikh al-Sharqawi clothed him in a quftan as an official act of investiture".<sup>30</sup> This marks the beginning of the 1805 revolt. When the Ottoman Vali heard about this he refused to accept this state of affairs and the situation turned into an armed revolt with the 'ulama again acting as the main impetus and rousing the masses to revolt. Sheikh al-Sharqawi and Umar Makran were amongst the 'ulama who implored the population to arm and report for action. In this instance, it was the 'ulama who made the deposing of the Ottoman Vali effective, "for Muhammad 'Ali's troops were divided amongst themselves, and were insufficient to carry out the coup successfully".<sup>31</sup> During the 1798 and 1800 revolts against the French, it was the 'ulama who were under siege in the narrow lanes and streets of Islamic Cairo, with the French firing on them from the hills of nearby Muqattam. Now, it was the 'ulama who, with the help of the masses, had the Ottoman Vali hemmed in at the Citadel. Al-Jabarti yet again gives us an interesting account of what happened:

*When the Vali found himself besieged in the Citadel, he was forced to send a messenger, who demanded an explanation from Umar Makram, and asked why the ulama had seen fit to disobey those set in authority over them, that is the Vali. Makram answered, 'those in authority are the ulama and the followers of shari'a and the righteous sultan, but this is a tyrannical man, and it is the tradition from time immemorial that ahl al-balad (people of the country) depose the Vali if he be unjust. Then, the messenger asked 'are we kuffar (unbelievers) that they should be so ill-treated and Makram once again replied: 'yes, for the ulama have decreed that it is righteous to fight you for you are rebellious (usah).<sup>32</sup>*

Umar Makram, the *Naqib al-Ashraf*, appears as a key figure in the 1805 revolt and in the effort to appoint Muhammad 'Ali as Vali of Egypt. Makram's wealth was vast and he was highly respected, so much so that the office he held of Naqib al-Ashraf was traditionally meant to be filled by either the Sheikhs al-Sadat or Bakri but in this instance an exception was made for Makram. In the 1805 revolt, al-Jabarti tells us that:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.328.

<sup>31</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses', p.274.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Jabarti, op. cit. '*Aja'ib*', Vol. III, p.331.

*Makram levied a contribution from the wealthier citizens (which they paid willingly), and bought arms to supply the populace, and even paid the poorer artisans a daily wage, as indemnity for leaving their trade and turning soldiers. As a result, he could call upon nearly 40,000 armed men.*<sup>33</sup>

It appears that the people accepted Makram as their leader and Muhammad 'Ali, at least for the time being, stood behind Makram.

Muhammed 'Ali consolidated his power between 1805 and 1808, using the support of the 'ulama to legitimise his rule; by 1809 he felt sufficiently stable and confident that he now turned against the 'ulama. Muhammad 'Ali was aware of the power and influence the 'ulama held not only in terms of their political importance, being close to Egypt's political centre and levers of power, but also through their ability to mobilise the population against unfavourable regimes and rulers. Wanting to ensure the stability and longevity of his own reign, Muhammad 'Ali saw the 'ulama as being the greatest threat to this, having seen the strength of their political power in their opposition to the unpopular French occupation as well as to the Ottoman Vali in the aftermath of the French withdrawal from Egypt.

Apart from wanting to eliminate those who could threaten his own rule, Muhammad 'Ali's attack on the 'ulama, and the weakening of the 'ulama's political potential, was meant to marginalise those who were most likely to oppose his personal plans for the modernisation and transformation of Egypt. He sought to remove threats and obstacles to his own particular vision of Egypt and the process of modernisation that he had charted for his country. Fundamental to his vision was the transformation of the country's education system, the expansion and centralisation of the state and its institutions, and the development of a large powerful army. These three interlinked processes and their consequent effects were to provide the basis of Egypt's transformation to a modern, centralised state with an educated and literate population possessing the technical skills to be able to assume positions within the growing state structure. His vision also saw Egypt possessing its own strong, well equipped and well

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<sup>33</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'The Role of the 'Ulama' in Egypt', p.274.

trained army capable of defending Egypt's interests both at home and abroad. He believed these features to be at the heart of European progress and success and sought to transform Egypt along the same European lines.<sup>34</sup>

The process of concentrating power in his own hands, while beginning with the elimination of the powerful Ottoman–Mamluk elite, continued with Muhammad 'Ali's "willingness to depart from traditional patterns and concepts of government and to banish from the seats of power the representatives of Allah's sacred law".<sup>35</sup> First, Muhammad 'Ali broke the 'ulama's material strength by confiscating land owned by *multazims* and abolishing the *iltizam* (tax farm system) altogether.<sup>36</sup> This move helped him gain favour in the countryside as many *fellahin* were treated unfairly by the *multazims*, of which the 'ulama were a large number. The *awqaf* managed and administered by the 'ulama were also brought under state control, thereby depriving 'ulama of control over this vast wealth which paid for *madaaris*, mosques, *katatib* (religious elementary schools) and other basic social provision within society.<sup>37</sup>

These measures significantly weakened the 'ulama's financial base which had, up to this time, enabled them to act independently of the political authorities. The fact that they had independent sources of income meant that they had been able to criticise political authorities without fear of being penalised financially. Not only were the 'ulama's sources of income vast – certainly in the case of the elite 'ulama – but their independence from the state, being untaxed, meant that the 'ulama enjoyed

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<sup>34</sup> Robert F. Hunter, *Egypt Under the Khedives, 1805–1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy*, Cairo, American University of Cairo Press, 2000; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad 'Ali*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984; Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed 'Ali Pasha, His Army and the Founding of Modern Egypt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Non-ideological Responses', p.180.

<sup>36</sup> Baer, op. cit. *Social History of Modern Egypt*, p.8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.182. Crecelius points out that, although Muhammad 'Ali "seized the revenues of the lucrative and extensive *awqaf khairiya* (general endowments) of the religious community, he did not seize the numerous *awqaf ahliya* (elite endowments) that were the basis of the personal wealth of the great 'ulama" (op. cit. 'Non-ideological Responses', p.182).

considerable autonomy from the state, a feature that strengthened their political potency.

Second, the 'ulama were pitted against each other; the long-standing internal divisions evident within the overall structure of the 'ulama were exploited. According to Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "the time honoured principle of divide and rule was put to use, [where Muhammad 'Ali] was to dispose of prominent 'ulama by using disgruntled rivals".<sup>38</sup> Al-Jabarti, keeping clear of the intrigue, tells us that Sheikh al-Sharqawi, the Sheikh al-Azhar was put under house arrest with the connivance of Sheikh Umar Makram, Marshal of the Notables. But later, Umar Makram was unable to escape the assault of Muhammad 'Ali and was himself then sent into exile through the intrigues of other Sheikhs whose names al-Jabarti withholds. As well as being exiled, their wealth and property were seized and the uncompromising manner in which these measures were taken instilled fear and concern within the ranks of the 'ulama. Having injected panic and uncertainty within the higher ranks of the 'ulama, and by deposing Umar Makram, Crecelius argues, "the 'ulama had no leader and no longer posed a serious threat to the new regime and effectively silenced those who might have taken a more vociferous stand against the Pasha".<sup>39</sup>

Finally, Muhammad 'Ali began to "interfere in the elections of the Sheikh al-Azhar so that no potential trouble makers could be elected. In this way, Sheikh al-Mahdi, an able politician, was discarded in favour of the pious and harmless Sheikh al-Shanawani".<sup>40</sup> From this point on, the political rulers of Egypt were to play a central role in selecting the Sheikh al-Azhar, which has remained the case up to the present time. This intrusion of the political authorities into the religious realm succeeded in further dismantling the political power of the 'ulama and particularly the authority of the Sheikh al-Azhar. By abolishing the independence of the Sheikh al-Azhar, Muhammad 'Ali was able to bring the authority and political potential of this office,

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<sup>38</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'Rectors of al-Azhar', p.271.

<sup>39</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses' p.181.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. 'Rectors of al-Azhar', p.271.

which had previously been significant, under his own control and, as Crecelius puts it, complete the 'ulama's "expulsion from Olympus".<sup>41</sup>

If Muhammad 'Ali's aim to curtail the 'ulama's political power was to some degree successful, his ability to render them irrelevant in other areas where the state encroached did not yield the same results. Crecelius concedes, "[h]aving eliminated the interference of the 'ulama in his government, Muhammad 'Ali left them virtually alone, to teach, think, write, or practice whatever they wanted so long as they did not undermine his programs within the sphere of government".<sup>42</sup> If this was the case, and the 'ulama's traditional spheres of authority remained untouched, it is important to reassess the wider reforms he pursued to see whether they further weakened the 'ulama by challenging their traditional religio-legal and pedagogical functions. Limiting the 'ulama's political influence by removing them from the arena of government alone appears not to have resulted in their complete marginalisation. Indeed, the 'ulama remained dominant in many significant areas of Egyptian society where their prominent position as guardians of the faith continued unchallenged by modernisation.

### **'Ulama Networks and Land Reform in the Nineteenth Century**

Debates concerning the reforms in Egypt over the course of the nineteenth century have aroused a variety of opinions and would benefit from further research. It is clear however, that Egypt underwent considerable transformation in this period but, as Baer argues, "[s]ocial change in nineteenth-century Egypt was a complex process which needs to be investigated in detail".<sup>43</sup> Egypt had four rulers or Valis who were later given the title of Khedive (Viceroy with hereditary succession) by royal firman (a decree issued by the Ottoman Sultan) during the course of the nineteenth century up until 1879. Each had different outlooks on reform and modernisation. Coupled with this, each ruler conducted foreign relations with the Ottoman Empire, and the major European powers (Britain and France in the main) in very diverse ways, seeing Egypt's

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<sup>41</sup> Crecelius, op. cit. 'Nonideological Responses', p.180.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>43</sup> Baer, op. cit. *Social History of Modern Egypt*, p.210.

place in the world along largely divergent tracks. These factors also had a significant impact on their views on the position of Islam within society, Egypt's place within the Islamic 'umma and the role of the 'ulama. Further complicating the picture over the course of the nineteenth century was the fact that reforms and modernisation occurred haphazardly, often decided upon as a result of political, cultural and ideological contingency and expediency at any given time.<sup>44</sup>

The foundation upon which the 'ulama's authority rested was primarily their religious authority, their Islamic scholarship and the historical legitimacy of their revered position within Islamic society. Upon this foundation, the 'ulama established for themselves an important set of functions that served society and increased their moral standing amongst the population. These key functions comprised: their pedagogical role, their role as interpreters of the Shari'a, which gave them an important juridical role in society, and finally their role as Islam's preachers and mosque functionaries, ensuring daily practice and adherence to orthodox Islamic principles. The political role they had come to inherit by the early nineteenth century was not central to their core functions but was rather a by-product of their moral authority, which political authorities had come to recognise and consider as an important legitimising factor given the shortcomings of their own rule. In providing a link between rulers and the ruled, 'ulama acquired political relevance because rulers saw them as fulfilling an important role providing moral legitimacy to the political authorities. Thus, as we have seen, the period of Mamluk rule was characterised by the 'ulama's heightened political role.

The effective link to the masses was provided by virtue of the 'ulama's extensive networks built on the basis of their wide-ranging functions that were woven into the social fabric of society. These networks were developed and strengthened over time

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<sup>44</sup> Hunter, op. cit. *Egypt Under the Khedives*; al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad 'Ali*; Fahmy, op. cit. *All the Pasha's Men*.

and existed outside of the political realm.<sup>45</sup> So long as the 'ulama's religio-legal and pedagogical functions remained immune from wider reforms, the 'ulama's vast networks continued to operate and the 'ulama found that their political marginalisation had very little impact on this aspect of their structural strength and moral influence on the masses.<sup>46</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the urban elite 'ulama's ties to rural Egypt were strong and 'ulama could rely on support from the *fellahin* who were employed on the land and were often severely exploited by the *multazims*, including the 'ulama *multazims* mentioned above. Evidence to suggest that this changed after Muhammad 'Ali's abolition of the *iltizam* is unconvincing. According to Gabriel Baer, the village community was bound together by three main factors: first, the village served as a fiscal unit, which meant that taxes were liable collectively by the village as a whole; second, land was held in common, with no individual rights; and third, the supply of labour for public works and irrigation was a common duty of the whole village.<sup>47</sup> While these aspects changed over the course of the nineteenth century, administrative responsibility for the village did not and remained with the Sheikh al-Balad (village headman), who continued to fill this role. The office of the Sheikh al-Balad had long been established during the period of Ottoman–Mamluk rule and continued right through the nineteenth century where it was later more commonly called *umdah* (sometimes referred to and spelt 'Omdeh'). Lord Cromer, Consul General in Egypt

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<sup>45</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya al-Jadida li Misr al-Qahira wa Muduniha wa Biladiha al-Shahira* (Tawfiq's Topography of Victorious Egypt, its Cities and Famous Regions), Cairo, Bulaq, 20 vols 1888–1889.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Vol. IV, p.13. In his 20-volume work, 'Ali Mubarak is critical of the 'ulama and how the institution is in urgent need of reform and the state of the mosques around the country and the outdated methods of teaching and subjects being taught. He was the disciple of Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, the nineteenth-century al-Azhar 'alim and modernist who will be looked at in the next chapter in great detail. Suffice to say that even such a critic of the al-Azhar 'ulama as 'Ali Mubarak Pasha, he nevertheless accepted the 'ulama's intellectual prominence and that of al-Azhar by describing it as dedicated to the "abolition of ignorance and granting eternal life to the world of knowledge". See also Michael J. Reimer, 'Contradiction and Consciousness in 'Ali Mubarak's Description of al-Azhar', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29:1, 1997, pp.53–69.

<sup>47</sup> Baer, op. cit. . *Social History of Modern Egypt*, p.17.

from 1883 to 1907, observed as late as the end of the century that “it was not too much to say that the whole life of the village turns upon the Omdeh”.<sup>48</sup>

Whether the Sheikh al-Balad was a religious position, as the title might suggest, is unknown and research in this field remains thin and inconclusive. The truth is that some were Sheikhs in the religious sense of the word and others were not. What we can say with certainty is that the post had key administrative functions intricately connected with the village and often relied on a Sheikh in his capacity as an assistant to help carry out tasks. The Sheikh al-Balad was appointed by, and carried out his tasks on behalf of, the *multazim* and, after the abolition of the *ilitzam* system between 1808 and 1814 when land was essentially nationalised, he effectively became a government employee. Specific functions of the Sheikh al-Balad ranged from collecting the tax from the *fellahin* of the village, ordering of public works, redistribution of land annually or on the death of a *fellah*, security of the village, arbitrating in disputes, legal functions such as trying cases and imposing punishments, maintaining a record of births and deaths and acting as a link between government and the village.<sup>49</sup>

To carry out these tasks, the Sheikh al-Balad had to be literate and in nineteenth century Egypt the 'ulama constituted the most likely group to be literate to the extent that was necessary to carry out this work. The only other group that possessed this capacity were the elite landowners and governing elites who constituted the vast bulk of Egypt's *multazims* along with other 'ulama. While the Sheikh al-Balad was not a member of the formal 'ulama corps, given that 'ulama almost entirely controlled education provision within the country until the latter part of the century, the Sheikh al-Balad would have acquired his education within a *madrassa* or *kuttab* and then at one of the three higher education institutes (Tanta, Alexandria and al-Azhar in Cairo), which were dominated entirely by 'ulama. His education and learning would have

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Baer op. cit. *Social History of Modern Egypt*, p.30.

<sup>49</sup> Baer, op. cit. *Social History of Modern Egypt*, pp.37–46. Some of the Sheikh al-Balad's functions increased and decreased over this time. See the Table 3.1: Rural Origins of Sheikh al-Azhars, 1689–1838 on p.99.



been religious in nature and village 'ulama and then 'ulama in the higher institutes would have been his teachers right throughout his studies.

His title denotes a man of learning and knowledge and certainly, to carry out his functions effectively, he would need to have more than a primary level of education. The Sheikh al-Balad's socio-economic and moral status within the community also had to be significant especially when we see all these features, they resemble those of the *multazim* 'ulama that al-Jabarti mentions in his chronicles as possessing great wealth and power. Indeed, in most cases, the Sheikh al-Balad was from "the richest families in the village ... held large tracts of land [and] they paid no tax".<sup>50</sup> Many social historians of Egypt have rightly pointed out that the abolition of the *iltizam* was a major step towards land reform in Egypt, opening the door to private ownership, which was introduced under the rule of Muhammad Said (r.1854–1863). It is further accepted that these measures may well have diminished the material wealth and political influence of the 'ulama among ruling circles, although this was also due to the emerging centralisation and bureaucratisation of the state along non-religious technocratic rather than religious lines. However, the administrative system remained largely intact – whereby the Sheikh al-Balad remained in his role with very few changes to his functions except that he was now a government employee; hence the entrenched networks of the 'ulama in villages and the connection between urban 'ulama and their rural backgrounds did not change and remained largely undisturbed by reform.<sup>51</sup>

The urban–rural networks of which the 'ulama were an integral part were deeply rooted for other reasons. First, studying at al-Azhar and gaining the status of 'ulama had become one of the major mechanisms for social mobility.<sup>52</sup> Many students of al-

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp.46–47.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp.53–60.

<sup>52</sup> Mubarak, op. cit. *al-Khitat*. There are many cases and examples 'Ali Mubarak refers to of 'ulama from village backgrounds and their social origins. See also Meir Hatina, '*Ulama*', *Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, UT, University of Utah Press, 2010, pp.30–31.

Azhar were from the countryside and often families sent their eldest sons to study while the younger sons remained on the land. After completing their studies and receiving the *ijaza* (permission) to teach, preach or be recognised as jurists, many qualified 'ulama returned to their villages to carry out a variety of functions within the mosque, *madrassa* or the local village administration and legal system. Second, while it is correct to point out that the urban networks of the 'ulama that developed around the guilds, as described above during the protests against the French, were more efficient because of the proximity of these groups to al-Azhar and the vast majority of urban 'ulama, many 'ulama were just as strongly attached to the villages and rural communities by virtue of their rural origins. Indeed, the table below shows the rural origins of many of the bearers of the office of Sheikh al-Azhar.

**Table 3.1 Rural Origins of Sheikh al-Azhars, 1689–1838**

<b><u>Name of Sheikh</u></b>	<b><u>Year of death</u></b>	<b><u>Geographic Origin</u></b>
Al-Khorashi	1689	Abu Khorash in Buhaira
Al-Nashrati	1708	Nashart
Shanan	1720	Al-Jidiya
Al-Fayyumi	1724	Fayyum
Al-Shabrawi	1756	Shubra
Al-Hifni	1767	Hifna
Al-Sajini	1768	Sajin
Al-Damanhuri	1778	Damanur
Al-Arusi	1793	Minyat al-Arus
Al-Sharqawi	1812	Tawila in Sharqiyya
Al-Shanawani	1817	Shanawan
Al-Arusi	1830	Minyat al-Arus
Al-Damhudji	1830	Damhuj
Al-Quwasni	1838	Quwasna <sup>53</sup>

### **‘Ulama and Legal Reform**

The religious authority of the ‘ulama continued through the nineteenth century as a result of their intricate links to the Shari’a and, as a result, to Egypt’s religio-legal system. This is despite many attempts at legal reform and a never-ending desire on the part of the political authorities to exert control over legal processes. Skovgaard-Petersen argues that, “everybody seems to agree that the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a

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<sup>53</sup> al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. ‘Ulama of Cairo’, p.157.

continual decline in the jurisdiction of Islamic courts".<sup>54</sup> Similarly, most studies also concur that, over the course of the nineteenth century, rather than Islamic law being the sole domain of the 'ulama, governments in Egypt continually interfered "in legal matters, often in complete violation of Shari'a precepts".<sup>55</sup> However, these studies fail to recognise that, despite government interference in judicial matters attempting to limit the importance of the Islamic courts, they did in fact continue to exist in Egypt throughout the nineteenth century (they were finally abolished in the 1950s). Moreover, the 'ulama remained a vital part of the judiciary and continued to carry out key legal functions, acting as judges (Quda), jurists (Fuqahah) and teachers of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the Shari'a. These key posts that the 'ulama held within the judiciary meant that both in the structure of the legal system and in the method of legal application in Egypt, the 'ulama remained integral to the functioning of the entire system.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Islamic courts had overall legal jurisdiction in Egypt with the chief judge (*qadi 'askar*) being nominated by the Sultan in Istanbul. The *qadi 'askar* would then appoint the other Quda in Egypt who presided over the Islamic courts and applied the law to cases brought before them. The Muftis (Islamic legal experts) were a crucial part of this structure as they often advised Quda on a point of law and could hear appeals against verdicts given by the Qadi and, when there was agreement between the Muftis of the four legal schools (*madhaahib*), could even get the Qadi to reconsider his verdict. In this way, Muftis acted as an important counterbalance to the Qadi and indeed "a check to Qadi abuses".<sup>56</sup> Later in the nineteenth century, under the rule of Muhammad 'Ali, where legal reform was aimed

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<sup>54</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, p.56.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. See also Muhammad Nur Farhat, *Al-Tarikh al-Ijtima'i li al-Qanun fi Misr al-Haditah- al-'Asr al-'Uthmani (The Social History of Law in Modern Egypt – The Ottoman Period)*, Cairo, al-Dar al-Faniya li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1986.

<sup>56</sup> Skovgaard-Petersen, op. cit. *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.57. See also Farhat Ziyadeh, *Lawyers, the Rule of Law and Liberalism in Modern Egypt*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Publication, 1968. Taking a more historical view and on the distinction between Mufti and Qadi and the division of their labour within the Islamic legal tradition, see Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

mainly at either increasing Egypt's autonomy from the Ottoman Empire or currying favour, new governing councils (*Diwan al-Wali*) were established across Egypt responsible for formulating laws and regulations in the areas of "education, navy, army, revenue, factories and European and Egyptian commercial affairs".<sup>57</sup> Despite this major administrative and legal reform, each *Diwan* had, as part of its organisation and structure, an 'alim from each of the four main *madhaahib* of Egypt, who remained integral to the functioning of the *Diwan*.

Even later during the nineteenth century, the 'ulama continued to be integral to the judicial system even when legal reforms were aimed at establishing alternative legal structures to the Shari'a courts. According to Skovgaard-Petersen, "[i]n the legal field, the most important event was the establishment of the Judicial Council, the *Majlis al-Ahkam* in 1848–49 and similar councils in the provinces".<sup>58</sup> These new courts "operated until the 'Urabi revolt and the British occupation"<sup>59</sup> and assumed responsibility for criminal matters, taking these matters away from the Shari'a courts. On the surface, this measure can be seen as an attempt to limit the authority of the Shari'a courts but, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that, while alternatives to the Shari'a courts were indeed emerging, the Shari'a courts remained important. So, for instance, Shari'a courts continued to preside over civil matters concerning "personal status and land".<sup>60</sup> Typically, this would have meant that disputes in marriages, divorce, inheritance and land status issues would have continued to be dealt with by the Shari'a courts. Not only was this a wide remit but the issues themselves were important, giving the courts considerable regulatory authority over the lives of many ordinary Egyptians.

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<sup>57</sup> Skovgaard-Petersen, op. cit. *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.57; see also Ziyadeh, op. cit. *Lawyers, the Rule of Law*, pp.12–13.

<sup>58</sup> Skovgaard-Petersen, op. cit. *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.57.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp.57–58.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Equally important was the specific legal role of the 'ulama in both the Shari'a courts and the new Judicial Councils. While 'ulama remained integral to the functioning of the Shari'a courts, providing Islamic legal guidance and direction to the Quda and guarding against miscarriages of justice, they also had a significant role in the newly formed *Majlis al-Akham*, which had primary importance in adjudicating criminal matters. In the Judicial Councils, they also had a significant task in dispensing rulings and judgments and in the overall functioning of the Councils. So, "[t]o each of the Councils was attached two *muftis* (a Hanafi and a Shafi'i)",<sup>61</sup> to ensure legal judgments stayed within accepted Islamic norms. By holding key roles within the *Majlis al-Akham*, the 'ulama retained importance even in this legal sphere, despite many reforms.

### **'Ulama and Education Reform**

In the realm of education, reforms carried out in the nineteenth century by Muhammad 'Ali and his successors must also be contextualised with regard to their impact on the religious schools and the 'ulama's pedagogical domination. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 'ulama had almost total control over the provision of education in the entire country. There was no centralised education system; rather, the primary and elementary religious schools and the three higher education institutes – al-Azhar in Cairo, the Ahmadi Mosque (*Gamia*) in Tanta and the Ibrahim Mosque in Alexandria – were all funded by individual charitable endowments that were administered by the 'ulama. The higher institutes all had dormitories (*riwaqs*) attached to them for board and lodging of their students and these were designated in accordance with the place of origin of the student. For instance, there were *riwaqs* for students from Syria, the Maghreb and other parts of the Muslim world and for domestic students from parts of Egypt.<sup>62</sup> These three institutions supplied virtually all the educated labour that was needed in Egypt at the time. This included a wide range of personnel all over the country: teachers for the network of primary and elementary schools in towns and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, pp.14–15.

villages; jurists attached to courts at every level from village to city; preachers (Imams) and sermon givers (Khatibs) to mosques up and down the country; and administrators to every institution as well as to the ruling elites and their commercial and land interests.<sup>63</sup>

According to Gabriel Baer, literacy amongst the population at the beginning of the nineteenth century was low and very few Egyptians attended school.<sup>64</sup> By contrast, in the description given by Edward Lane, the famous Orientalist, during his time in Egypt between 1825 and 1849, he observes that in the villages and rural areas there were many *katatib* and that the presence of these basic Islamic schools was difficult to miss, with gatherings of children and their instructors normally organised around various public places, including public fountains, mosques and other public areas. Typically, an instructor taught the memorization of the Quran by first reading a sentence and requiring the children in the class to repeat after him over and over again.<sup>65</sup> These were the primary level *katatib* situated all over the country, through which a religious education was dispensed. The extent of this education was certainly to teach students to read the Quran, that is, to memorise it, but there was no critical examination of the text. The purpose was merely to impart religious values, customs and an understanding of Islamic principles and behaviour as prescribed by the Quran and to teach the basics of reading and writing.<sup>66</sup>

The 'ulama's dominance over the educational sphere in Egypt was grounded in the historical fact that in Islam they were the possessors of knowledge, which itself derived from the religion and its sacred sources. With knowledge ('ilm) so intricately linked

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp.10–11.

<sup>64</sup> On the levels of schooling in Egypt during the nineteenth century, see Baer, op. cit. *Social History of Modern Egypt*, p.227. Baer here estimates that at the beginning of Muhammad 'Ali's reign, "not more than 5 per cent of the children between six and twelve years of age received any formal education at all".

<sup>65</sup> Edward Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London, Dent, 1908 pp.60–64.

<sup>66</sup> Lois A Aroian, *The Nationalisation of Arabic and Islamic Education in Egypt: Dar al-'Ulum and al-Azhar*, Cairo Papers in Social Science, Vol. vi, Monograph iv, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, December 1983, p.5.

to Islamic scholasticism, the 'ulama were the sole experts and interpreters of the sacred sources; they were masters of the Arabic language that is, it is worth emphasising, the language of the Quran and the language of God given to the Arabs. The 'ulama controlled and dispensed justice based on Islamic law (Shari'a) with its ultimate source being the Quran and Hadith (the sayings and customs of the Prophet Muhammad). The link between Islam and knowledge is reflected in the curriculum of al-Azhar, which was almost entirely dominated by Islamic 'transmitted' sciences such as *tajwid* (art of Quranic recitation); *qira'at* (knowledge of the accepted reading of the Quran); *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis); Hadith (verified reports about the Prophet Muhammad's sayings); *fiqh* (jurisprudence); *usul al-fiqh* (fundamental principles of jurisprudence); *fara'id al-mirath* (inheritance laws); *tawhid* (theology); *tasawwuf* (mysticism).<sup>67</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, many of the mosques and schools were falling into a desperate state of disrepair largely due to 'ulama mismanagement and the squandering of *awqaf* funds. When, early on in his reign, Muhammad 'Ali confiscated the 'ulama's jurisdiction over the *awqaf* and placed these under state control, the fear was that the situation would worsen for Egypt's schools and higher education institutes. Whether this did actually occur is somewhat outside the scope of this study, although it is yet another question that deserves further research. The aim of Muhammad 'Ali's sweeping measure was to weaken the 'ulama's hold on the country's educational sphere, allowing him to pursue the reforms he desired in line with his wider plans for Egypt's modernisation and transformation. As discussed above, his planned transformation of Egypt's army and the centralisation of the state, manned by a well-trained and efficient bureaucracy, were only possible by training a new generation of educated Egyptians that could help run the country and administer and deliver the reforms efficiently. With the education system he inherited almost entirely dominated by the Islamic sciences listed above and unable to provide a

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.7. Here, Aroian illustrates all the subjects under four headings including 1) Transmitted Sciences; 2) Rational and Linguistic Sciences; 3) Rational and 4) Religious, but explains that "[s]tudents spent most of their time studying *fiqh*, *tafsir* or grammar because those were the subjects in which teachers tended to specialize". See also 'Abd al-Mut'al al-Sa'idi, *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar (History of Reform in al-Azhar)*, Cairo, Matba'at al-Itimad, 1943, p.36.



sufficiently adequate labour force needed for a re-modelling of Egypt's army, state and bureaucracy, Muhammad 'Ali began to make plans to rectify this situation.<sup>68</sup>

In the early years of his reign, Muhammad 'Ali employed European technocrats and advisors to help reform and run the increasingly centralised state. Likewise, with the collapse of Napoleon's army in 1815, the services of a significant number of French military experts became available, which Muhammad 'Ali used to begin modernising his army.<sup>69</sup> In the years 1809–1830, he sought to provide the necessary training to his most talented indigenous students in two ways. The first was to develop a range of secondary and higher level technical schools in Egypt. The secondary level schools would feed students into the new technical schools.<sup>70</sup> Second, and as early as 1809, he despatched students and study missions to Europe to receive training in a variety of sciences, humanities, military and technical subjects. The early student missions received training mainly in technical areas such as military science and engineering, printing, shipbuilding and mechanics.<sup>71</sup> The subjects studied in later student missions were extended to include language and literature, law, botany and zoology and other natural sciences, humanities and social sciences. It was this later extended programme of subjects that was studied by Sheikh Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, the notable al-Azhar-trained reformer, who will be discussed in Chapter 4.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hunter, op. cit. *Egypt Under the Khedives*; al-Sayyid Marsot, op. cit. *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad 'Ali*; Fahmy, op. cit. *All the Pasha's Men*.

<sup>69</sup> Gesink, op. cit. p.11.

<sup>70</sup> J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, London, Cass, 1968, pp.115–52. Technical schools at the higher education level were the War School (1824) which taught drawing, French, tactics, arithmetic, geometry, infantry exercises and gunnery; the School of Music (1824) taught bugling and trumpeting; School of Medicine (1827); Veterinary School (1827); School of Maternity for midwives (1831) and Engineering (1831). See also Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, p.20.

<sup>71</sup> Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit. *History of Education*, pp.104–06; appears also in Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, p.20.

<sup>72</sup> Alain Silvera, 'The First Egyptian Student Mission to France Under Muhammad 'Ali' in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim (eds), *Modern Egypt: Studies in Politics and Society*, London, Frank Cass, 1980, pp.1–19.

There can be little doubt as to the consequences of early nineteenth century education reforms on the expansion of the economy, the growth of the military and indeed efforts to centralise and modernise the state bureaucracy. Yet, structurally, these reforms had little or no impact on those areas of education that the 'ulama controlled. Furthermore, the reforms failed to disentangle the country's intellectual tradition from the grip of the 'ulama. For instance, it was the military schools that taught technical subjects not offered by the mass of the religious schools and the three religious higher institutes. The 'ulama, while alarmed at the loss of their *awqaf* privileges, their *iltizams* and other wealth creating possibilities, nevertheless felt that their pedagogical functions and associated learning institutes – the *katatib* and the higher institutes – were largely unaffected by Muhammad 'Ali's educational reforms. In fact, the reforms succeeded only in establishing a parallel educational system that could neither compete with the religious schools nor absorb them into its structure.<sup>73</sup>

The primary religious schools were vast, had no central authority administering them, and, as mentioned, were also in a state of disrepair. The cost and time needed to bring these up-to-date would have been enormous, two factors that Muhammad 'Ali did not possess. Revenue from increased agricultural production and the introduction of cash crops that marked Muhammad 'Ali's aggressive agricultural policy early in his reign were used in building his army to ensure his own rule and to secure Egypt's borders from predatory imperial forces. With the French having departed only recently, the need for shoring up Egypt's defences was deemed more urgent than spreading non-religious primary education. In addition, the curricula of al-Azhar and the other higher institutes and the primary schools, the teaching methods and the personnel remained firmly in place throughout this period. Indeed, it is unclear whether Muhammad 'Ali was ever enamoured with the idea of primary educational reform. Despite the Primary School Regulation of 1836, formulated much later in his reign, declaring to "spread the principles of science among the population",<sup>74</sup> Muhammad 'Ali instructed his son

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<sup>73</sup> Fritz Steppat, 'National Education Projects in Egypt Before British Occupation' in P. M. Holt (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, p.297.

<sup>74</sup> Ahmad 'Izzat Abd al-Karim, *Tarikh al-Ta'lim fi 'Asr Muhammad 'Ali (The History of Education in the Era of Muhammad 'Ali)*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahda al Misriyya, 1938, p.681.

Ibrahim Pasha in a private note around the same time “against spreading education beyond the recruits for state service”.<sup>75</sup>

The strides made by Muhammad ‘Ali in establishing a new education system in order to bypass religious *madrassa* education were not only limited in their reach<sup>76</sup> but, by the 1840s, these had slowed down considerably as a consequence of the European powers restraining Muhammad ‘Ali’s expansionist pretensions through the Convention of London 1840, which required the reduction of Egypt’s standing army to a mere 18,000. As a result, Egypt’s economy stagnated and educational reform was abruptly halted in the last years of Muhammad ‘Ali’s rule. His next two successors, Abbas I (r.1848–1854) and Sa’id I (r.1854–1863), “did little to further the development of education”<sup>77</sup> despite the formulation of a plan submitted to Sa’id I in 1854 to attempt to merge government schools with those reformed traditional schools providing a universal and comprehensive primary education able to equip students with a general and wide-ranging knowledge base.<sup>78</sup> Sa’id’s successor, Isma’il I (r.1863–1879) did make a significant effort in the development of primary education. In the realm of higher education too Ismail I made more use of graduates from the Islamic higher institutes – in particular al-Azhar – by establishing a teacher training college where the brightest students were sent to receive training in modern subjects and those teachers who showed reformist or modernist tendencies were instructed in new teaching methods.

Isma’il’s intentions to develop Egypt’s education throughout the country were clear when he addressed the consuls of the foreign powers and declared that schools “are the base of every progress” and, following this speech, reopened the School Department, which had been closed down by his predecessor Sa’id almost as soon as

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<sup>75</sup> Steppat, op. cit. ‘National Education Projects’, p.281.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp.294–95; see also Silvera op. cit. ‘First Egyptian Student Mission’, p.17–8.

<sup>77</sup> Steppat, op. cit. ‘National Education Projects’, p.282.

<sup>78</sup> Ahmed ‘Izzat Abd al-Karim, *Tarikh al-Ta’lim fi Misr min Nihayat Hukm Muhammad ‘Ali ila Awail Hukm Tawfiq, 1848–1882 (The History of Education in Egypt from the End of Muhammad ‘Ali’s Rule to the Beginning of Tawfiq’s Rule, 1848–1882)*, Cairo, n.p., 1945, Vol. 1 p.177.

he took office in 1854.<sup>79</sup> In 1868, Khedive Isma'il (he had been given the title of Khedive in 1866 by the Ottoman Sultan) ratified the Primary School Law, which proposed that all small *katatib* were to be supervised by the government and those with over seventy students be wholly taken over by the government. Other measures, according to this Law, were that every province and large city was to have a government primary school where admission was open to all students regardless of social status or religion and tuition; meals and, if necessary, board and lodging and clothing were to be free. After the neglect that Abbas I and Sa'id I had shown towards education and the failure of Muhammad 'Ali's educational drive to target primary level education and the traditional religious system of the *katatib*, these measures can be seen as the first attempts to extend "government control over all traditional systems"<sup>80</sup> and to formulate a national system of education merging the religious schools and government schools under one unified system.

With such an ambitious plan to modernise Egypt's schools and with *awqaf* revenues re-allocated to finance many of the schools (thus placing as little a financial burden as possible on the state), the policy soon ran into the practical problem of supplying adequately qualified teachers for the expanding government schools. The few teachers who remained in the higher technical institutes, many of which had been disbanded, were employed within the higher technical schools themselves. Al-Azhar and the other two higher institutes were, as the evidence suggests, left alone, unreformed and continuing to operate along traditional Islamic lines with tradition-bound teaching methods and a curriculum dominated by the Islamic 'transmitted' sciences. As long as Muhammad 'Ali had not modernised the traditional *katatib* system, al-Azhar continued to be sufficient as a supplier of teachers to the Islamic primary schools. Now, under Isma'il I, state policy on education had shifted fundamentally to targeting and reforming primary level education and to creating a unified national education system rather than merely creating a parallel system alongside the religious one.

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<sup>79</sup> Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects', p.287. Here Steppat quotes Georges Douin, *Histoire du regime du Khedive Ismail*, Cairo, n.p, 1933–41, Vol. 1, p.2.

<sup>80</sup> Aroian, op. cit. *Nationalisation of Arabic and Islamic Education*, p.10.

Changes to the primary school syllabus included teaching foreign languages, arithmetic, economics, history, geography and, in the case of the *madaaris markaziyya* (central schools), zoology, botany and agriculture were now added for the first time. This meant re-training the existing teachers and ensuring adequate provision for new ones as the system expanded.<sup>81</sup>

Many students sent to Europe on Muhammad 'Ali's study missions (see above) returned to take up positions within the state bureaucracy and had, by the second half of the century, established themselves as senior figures with significant state portfolios. 'Ali Mubarak Pasha was one of these figures and his talents extended into the educational realm. A disciple of Sheikh Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Imam to the first group study mission sent to France in 1826 (see Chapter 4), 'Ali Mubarak held the post of Director of the Department of Schools. Recognising that the success of the educational reforms being proposed at the primary level depended on "the availability of a sufficient number of suitable teachers,"<sup>82</sup> he established the first teacher training college in Egypt. Dar al-'Ulum (House of Sciences) began training qualified graduates and teachers from the higher institutes, drawing most of its intake from al-Azhar.

Both measures discussed above posed a challenge to the 'ulama's monopoly over the educational sphere of Egyptian society. A few reformist 'ulama, spurred on by the ideas of Sheikh Hassan al-Attar and Sheikh Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, had come to accept that entrusting the provision of national education to the 'ulama would not lead to sufficiently comprehensive modernisation and reform. Thus, in the committee that formulated the law, 'Ali Mubarak was able to have a number of "'ulama and notables from outside government service".<sup>83</sup> In addition, the avenues to social mobility had been widened with the expansion of the state bureaucracy, associated departments and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.10. See also Mubarak, op. cit. *al-Khitat*, Vol. 9, p.51; Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects', p.290.

<sup>82</sup> Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects', p.292.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.289. The names appear in Amin Sami, *Taqwim al-Nil (Calendar of the Nile)*, Cairo, Matba'at Dar al-Kutub wa al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya bi al-Qahira, 2002, 3 vols., Vol 3, pp.2 and 782; and Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit. *History of Education*, pp.361–62.

commissions, courts, and the economy; this led graduates to consider more lucrative careers in these areas rather than the traditional paths where recognition as a member of the 'ulama would lead to. An al-Azhar education and a career as an 'alim was once the only route to social mobility but now modern schools offered opportunities to those who sought a formal westernised education in the state schools and aspired to positions such as clerks, civil servants and teachers in the new modern schools. These were the proto-*effendis* of the early twentieth century<sup>84</sup> and the new educational institutes offered the possibility of gaining qualifications and obtaining the type of training that would lead to these careers. The challenge to al-Azhar and the 'ulama's dominance came as a result of the state offering an alternative, non-religious education. Students – both at the primary and higher levels – became attracted to the benefits that an expanding state and economy offered and sought careers outside the traditional religious channels. So, student numbers increased within the primary schools and al-Azhar graduates now had many more opportunities open to them.

The 'ulama's hold on education was further challenged by the plans laid out in the Primary School Law and the emergence of Dar al-'Ulum. For the first time, the government made a concerted attempt to control the content of the entire education system. It established inspectors for the primary schools and insisted on the teaching of new subjects and modern teaching methods, which fell outside the competencies of the traditional 'ulama.<sup>85</sup> Reforms also sought to radically alter the structure of the system by abandoning the previous policy of leaving the religious schools intact and introducing a parallel system. In contrast to earlier efforts, Isma'il's reforms reached right to the heart of the 'ulama's dominance, not only by weakening their control over schools but by absorbing these into the state structure. Even at the higher education

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<sup>84</sup> Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp.7–11; see also Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture, 1870–1919*, Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2011, p24.

<sup>85</sup> Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects', p.295.

level, al-Azhar's dominance was challenged by the establishment of Dar al-'Ulum and by the introduction of a system of formal graduation and examination.

Previously, students at al-Azhar would study under a recognised 'alim and gradually, as they acquired the necessary expertise, would begin to instruct classes themselves. If the student demonstrated the requisite skills and his circle of students (*halqa*) grew, this would act as tacit recognition of his skill in his chosen subjects and mastery of the texts. The student would then be given the *ijaza* (permission) to teach or to claim recognition as an 'alim. The introduction of a formal examination process in the same year Dar al-'Ulum was established drew much criticism from students and Sheikhs alike despite being introduced by the Sheikh al-Azhar, Sheikh Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi (see Chapter 6). As part of the new examination system, students would be examined formally by a panel of senior 'ulama in a range of subjects and texts. The introduction of formal examinations was yet another example of a unified approach to education aimed at ensuring teachers possessed a standardised quality and knowledge base able to teach within a unified and centrally administered education system.<sup>86</sup>

Although the plans detailed above were wide-ranging, their implementation was fraught with difficulties, clearly evidenced in the final results. Dar al-'Ulum's intake was almost entirely made up of al-Azhar graduates. The training and instruction these graduates had received coming from al-Azhar was still overwhelmingly religious in nature and the early intake struggled to adapt to learning new secular subjects and also new teaching methods.<sup>87</sup> Upper age limits were relaxed for the new intake to compensate for the lack of skills. But if the older entrants to Dar al-'Ulum demonstrated a greater knowledge of Arabic and a better knowledge of other secular subjects, they were nevertheless more entrenched in their inability to embrace new methods of teaching and instruction and found it difficult to adapt to the new demands that Dar al-'Ulum placed upon them. Indeed, it has been argued that the al-Azhar

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<sup>86</sup> Al-Sa'idi, op. cit *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar*, pp.34–43.

<sup>87</sup> Aroian, op. cit. *Nationalisation of Arabic and Islamic Education*, p.29.

teachers admitted to Dar al-'Ulum "were criticised for still being under the spell of al-Azhar rigidity".<sup>88</sup>

In fact, these problems can also be seen in the available data from the first years of Dar al-'Ulum's existence. The first point to make is that it was the only institute of its kind to emerge in this period. If Dar al-'Ulum is to be considered a challenge to al-Azhar's dominance in producing teachers for the national primary schools and as a higher level institute, it was a particularly weak one. In its first year, its intake was a mere fifty students, all from al-Azhar.<sup>89</sup> Contrast this with the number of students enrolled in al-Azhar around the same time in 1875 – 11,095 – reported in Heyworth-Dunne's study. Indeed, even comparing this to the students enrolled at the other higher institutes at the time in Tanta and Alexandria in 1875 – 3,827 in the Ahmadi Mosque in Tanta and 413 in the Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Alexandria – the figures for Dar al-'Ulum seem insignificant.<sup>90</sup> The results of Dar al-'Ulum's efforts are also worth highlighting as these reflect the problems students encountered with the new subjects and teaching methods. In the first five years of producing graduates from 1873 to 1877, Dar al-'Ulum produced only 18 such graduates. In the next five years up to the 'Urabi Revolt in 1882, it produced a further 32. It was not until the early part of the twentieth century that it began to produce significantly more graduates, with still only 64 graduating in 1918.<sup>91</sup>

Not only did Dar al-'Ulum pose a limited challenge to the 'ulama's dominance of the higher education institutes and in particular al-Azhar, it fell far short of providing the teachers needed for the primary schools around the country which had come under government control.<sup>92</sup> The meagre supply of teachers alone was not responsible for

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<sup>88</sup> Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects', p.294.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.293.

<sup>90</sup> Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit. *History of Education*, p.405.

<sup>91</sup> Aroian, op. cit. *Nationalisation of Arabic and Islamic Education*, p.28.

<sup>92</sup> Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit. *History of Education*, pp.373–74. Here Heyworth-Dunne goes so far as to suggest that the teaching of the Quran and traditional teaching methods remained predominant in even the new modern schools because of a lack of new teachers.



the failure of educational reform at the primary level but it is true that the under-qualified teaching provision played a part; it proved “impossible to narrow the gap between the great majority of these (*katatib*) schools and those of the modern system; for instance the plan to introduce arithmetic failed”.<sup>93</sup> During the period of Isma'il's rule, the first national girls' school was opened with two schools, the largest among all the schools, with a combined enrolment of 890 girls – one of the Khedive's wives taking a special interest in this project.<sup>94</sup> Yet again, despite a clear desire to reform primary education, efforts and results were disappointing. By the end of Isma'il's rule, “there were in Egypt some thirty modern primary schools under government control, eight or nine of which were outside Cairo”.<sup>95</sup>

It is evident that the modernising reforms in Egypt over the course of the nineteenth century were complex and had far-reaching consequences for Egyptian society. For the 'ulama in particular, the reforms clearly had a destabilising effect. Abolishing their financial privileges and cutting their ties to the ruling elites enabled Muhammad 'Ali to restrict their significant political influence, amply demonstrated during the Ottoman/Mamluk era, the French occupation and in fact his own rise to power. Having weakened the 'ulama's political strength considerably, he also greatly diminished their capacity to oppose his rule and to mount an effective challenge to his planned reforms, some of which were to encroach later on the 'ulama's traditional functions in society.

The emergence of a modern centralised state in Egypt further intensified the challenge to the 'ulama's previously dominant position. As the state expanded and assumed greater control over society through reforms, it encroached on those areas that the 'ulama had either once dominated or had a major hand in, such as the rural and urban economies, land ownership, the law, education and pedagogy. However, while the challenge to the 'ulama's domination of these spheres was significant, reforms were

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<sup>93</sup> Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects', p.295. These conclusions appear also in the following: Heyworth-Dunne, op. cit. *History of Education*, pp.370–71; Ahmad 'Izzat Abd al-Karim, op. cit. *Tarikh al-Ta'lim*, 1945, Vol. 2, p.298.

<sup>94</sup> Steppat, op. cit. 'National Education Projects'.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.293.

not comprehensive and left large parts of society untouched where the 'ulama were able to retreat, construct new obstacles to reforms and devise ways to limit the intrusion of the state on their traditional functions.

Furthermore, while Egypt's rulers saw the 'ulama as largely conservative in wanting to preserve their privileges and obstruct reforms, they also recognised the advantages of having the 'ulama's cooperation in implementing and legitimising the reform agenda. Throughout the period under discussion there were a small number of 'ulama who welcomed reform and felt this necessary if Islam and the 'ulama were to continue to have relevance in a rapidly changing modern world. These reformist 'ulama disagreed with their conservative counterparts and argued for change. More important, at the conceptual level, reformist 'ulama insisted that Islam was compatible with modernity and saw the need for 'ulama to broaden their learning by accepting new forms of scientific knowledge, an approach that was absent in the Islamic institutes and that had led to a general lack of progress among Muslims. According to the reformist 'ulama, the curricula of the Islamic schools and higher institutes had to be updated and new teaching methods and subjects had to be introduced as a basis for rejuvenating Egypt. These reformist 'ulama, often referred to as 'modernist' 'ulama, remained close to Egypt's rulers, retained many of the privileges of old and were able to have a significant impact on the shape and direction of reforms and the intellectual tradition within Egypt over the second half of the century.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Modernism, Nationalism and the Nationalisation of Islam**

The emergence of nationalism in Egypt is intimately tied to the process of modernisation and reform and the ways in which these impacted on Egyptian society throughout the nineteenth century. The increasing centralisation of the state and modernising reforms limited the political role of the ‘ulama and significantly reduced their economic privileges and status. These reforms also forced the ‘ulama to retreat within those spheres of influence and authority that remained relatively untouched by state encroachment. Gradually, however, reform measures also forced ‘ulama to confront and engage with fundamental questions relating to the modernisation and reform of Egyptian society. While, at the beginning of the century, they had tried to insulate themselves and their traditional spheres of authority from the changes that they experienced going on around them, as reforms brought greater contact with Europe and new ideas about education, science, progress and community, ‘ulama were drawn into an increasingly wide ranging debate about how these ideas related to and should be applied in Egypt.

This chapter will explore the relationship between the debates about Islamic reform, in particular in the educational and intellectual spheres, and debates concerning the reform of society and the emergence of nationalism in Egypt. Initially, these debates were mainly carried out among a small circle of reformist ‘ulama but, as the century wore on, greater numbers of ‘ulama were attracted to the debates. Most ‘ulama continued to reject the idea of Islamic reform and argued that what was needed was a return to the pristine and authentic teachings of the sacred sources of Islam. On the other hand, reform minded ‘ulama believed that a proper reading of Islam’s authentic sacred sources showed that embracing new forms of knowledge and broadening the scope of education would not only be compatible with Islam but remained fundamental to its teachings and principles. In this chapter, I will focus on the work of three reformist ‘ulama whose lives span the nineteenth century and I will demonstrate how their work not only became crucial to underpinning reform efforts in Egypt but also how these ideas were the precursors to, and vital influences on, the emergence of nationalism in Egypt.

## Tahtawi and his 'National' Impact

Rifa'a Badawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801–1873)<sup>1</sup> began his studies at al-Azhar in 1817. He was taught by Sheikh Hasan al-Attar,<sup>2</sup> who was one of the most influential 'alims of the day and was Sheikh al-Azhar from 1830 to 1834. Sheikh Hasan al-Attar was considered a brilliant scholar and studied in Istanbul, Albania and Syria between 1803 and 1813; on his return to Egypt, he lectured at al-Azhar and advocated the reform of al-Azhar education, which he believed was outdated and narrow. In a commentary he wrote on the *Jam'a al-jawwami*, a book on the fundamentals of theology, he offered his views on the inadequate nature of education at al-Azhar:

*We have limited ourselves to the study of narrow, derivative books composed by recent authors, which we repeat throughout life, and we do not permit ourselves to study anything else, as if true knowledge is contained within them. When we receive a question on theology that is not found within them, we dispose of it [by saying] that it is of the philosophers' debate ... or a literary point from among the topics that have been disproved.*<sup>3</sup>

He was considered an ardent reformer and, although he enjoyed the favour of Muhammad 'Ali for his reformist views, he was widely disliked amongst the conservative al-Azhar 'ulama who were the overwhelming majority at the time.<sup>4</sup> His close association with Muhammad 'Ali played a role in persuading the Vali to send the young al-Tahtawi on the educational mission to France in 1826. Al-Tahtawi remained in France for five years (1826–1831) and, as well as concentrating on his religious function with the mission, he spent much of his time studying the "French language and reading books on ancient history, Greek philosophy and most

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<sup>1</sup> On the life of al-Tahtawi, see Jamal al-Din Amal-Shayyal, *Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi*, Cairo, np, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760–1840*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979, pp.76–91. See also 'Ali Mubarak, *al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya al-Jadida li Misr al-Qahira wa Muduniha wa Biladiha al-Shahira (Tawfiq's Topography of Victorious Egypt, its Cities and Famous Regions)*, Cairo, Bulaq, 1886–89, Vol. 4, pp.38–49.

<sup>3</sup> 'Abd al-Muta'al al-Sa'idi, *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar (History of Reform in al-Azhar)*, Cairo, Matba'at al-Itimad, 1943, p.20. See also Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, p.24.

<sup>4</sup> Gran, op. cit. *Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, p.88; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, 'Modernization Among the Rectors of al-Azhar 1798-1879' in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p.274.

importantly eighteenth century French Enlightenment thought especially the works of Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu”.<sup>5</sup> According to Albert Hourani, the period al-Tahtawi spent in France and his study of French Enlightenment thought had a profound effect on his intellectual development but, crucially, Hourani shows, through al-Tahtawi’s own written works and his career in education and translating, that his time in France also “left a permanent mark on the Egyptian mind”.<sup>6</sup>

For al-Tahtawi, his French experience had not only exposed him to the ideas of the Enlightenment but had also shown him the power of these ideas when applied to society. Retaining a critical view of the French, al-Tahtawi nevertheless saw much to admire: as well as the general cleanliness of Paris, he also admired the French insistence on the “prolonged education of children”<sup>7</sup> as well as their “intellectual curiosity and above all their social morality”.<sup>8</sup> These features of French society were, according to al-Tahtawi, due in large part to France adopting and indeed embracing the ideals and principles of the Enlightenment. But, most important for al-Tahtawi, was perhaps Montesquieu’s idea of the nation as a geographically bounded entity imbued with a particular “national spirit”, with love of this nation being the basis for political virtue.<sup>9</sup> Al-Tahtawi sought to draw parallels between these ideas of the nation and Egypt and began thinking about the distinct and enduring history of Egypt and its almost unchanging territorial boundaries.<sup>10</sup> On his return to Egypt, he took up various posts, including as Head of the new School of Languages, Schools Inspector and, later,

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 69; see also Alain Silvera, ‘The First Student Mission to France under Muhammad ‘Ali’ in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim (eds), *Modern Egypt: Studies in Politics and Society*, London, Frank Cass, 1980, p.9.

<sup>6</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.70.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image: From its Origins to Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1972, p.123. Here Wendell identifies the fact that Egypt’s territorial boundaries are “determinable with unusual ease and little or no dispute”.

editor of the Government mouthpiece newspaper *Waka'i al-Misriyya* (Egyptian Events).<sup>11</sup>

As well as the posts mentioned above where he prepared students for the emerging professional schools aimed at producing educated students capable of taking up positions in Muhammad 'Ali's expanding bureaucracy, al-Tahtawi's most notable contribution must be his leading role in translating and indeed commissioning and overseeing the translation of many great works from French into Arabic.<sup>12</sup> His activities were to bring the ideas contained in these works to an Arabic reading public for the first time – which proved to be highly influential for the next generation of Egyptian intellectuals.<sup>13</sup> Al-Tahtawi believed that education in Egypt had suffered under the control of the traditional 'ulama, becoming backward and inward looking. Instead of embracing the technological advances taking place in Europe, Egypt found itself unable to comprehend these advances because of its outdated and inadequate education system, which ignored the rational sciences and insisted on traditional Islamic education. Far from relegating them to a bygone age, though, al-Tahtawi called for the 'ulama to open their learning institutes to the “sciences created by human reason”,<sup>14</sup> insisting that “if the 'ulama are to interpret the Shari'a in the light of modern needs, they must know what the modern world is”.<sup>15</sup>

Coupled with his work as a translator, al-Tahtawi's importance to the development of Egyptian nationalism can be seen in his own works where he is, according to Hourani, the first Egyptian intellectual to “articulate the idea of the Egyptian nation ... [and to]

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<sup>11</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.71. For an account of al-Tahtawi's life and thought, see also Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief list of these works see Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.71.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.71. Hourani tells us that in 1841, a bureau of translation was established within the School of Languages and was headed by al-Tahtawi. During the period of al-Tahtawi's position as head, he himself translated some “twenty works including histories of the ancient world, the Middle Ages, Voltaire's *Lives of Peter the Great* and *Charles XII of Sweden*, a book on Greek philosophers and Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence*”.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

justify it in terms of Islamic thought”.<sup>16</sup> On his return to Egypt from Paris, he published his first major work, which gave an account of his stay in Paris and his observations of Parisian society.<sup>17</sup> The importance of this work lay not merely in recording an Egyptian’s observations of mid-nineteenth century Paris but in what it shows about the impact of his sojourn there on his thought. For al-Tahtawi, the qualities of the French and their society, to say nothing of their power and status in international terms, stemmed from the ideas of the Enlightenment and the fact that the French had embraced these ideas with great enthusiasm. In a later work, which deals more with conditions in Egypt,<sup>18</sup> al-Tahtawi takes great pride, unlike other Islamic scholars of the time, in pointing towards the immensity of the achievements of the ancient Egyptians: the thrust of this book is to urge its readers to once again achieve this greatness in the modern era.

Indeed, rather than simply advocate embracing the rationalism of the Enlightenment, al-Tahtawi merges this with the history and Islamic traditions of Egypt. For instance, in matters of government, he clearly draws on Montesquieu’s notion of the separation of powers and attempts to adapt this idea to local Egyptian circumstances. He argues that Egyptian society is ordered or divided into four distinct ‘estates’, each with particular functions, which, if working properly, should all contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole. The four ‘estates’, he says, are the ruler, the ‘ulama, the soldiers and those engaged in economic activity.<sup>19</sup> Rejecting the secular civic French model of nationalism that asserts the centrality of the people to ‘rule’ and the abolition of an autocratic ruler, al-Tahtawi, cautious of the proximity and dependence of his position on Khedival favour, upholds the traditional Islamic model of governance, which sees the ruler rule in conjunction with the ‘ulama and where the ‘ulama represent the people to the ruler. So, while he did not feel the traditional model of Islamic

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<sup>16</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, pp.68–69.

<sup>17</sup> Rafi’ Rifa’a Tahtawi, *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz (The Extraction of Gold in the Summary of Paris)*, Cairo, Bulaq, 1849.

<sup>18</sup> Rafi’ Rifa’a Tahtawi, *Manahij al-Albab al-Misriyya fi Mabahij al-Adab al-Asriyya (The Roads of Egyptian Hearts in the Joys of the Contemporary Arts)*, Cairo, Bulaq, 1869.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.348.

governance should be altered, he did see how absolute power may corrupt and therefore insisted on the separation of 'estates' as representing an effective mechanism limiting the ruler's power.<sup>20</sup>

In relation to the status of the 'ulama and the teaching at al-Azhar, however, al-Tahtawi found plenty to criticise. Vastly knowledgeable in Islamic law himself and a Shafi'i by legal rite, al-Tahtawi blamed Egypt's backwardness in education on the 'ulama and their continued rejection of non-Islamic forms of education and fields of enquiry being taught at al-Azhar.<sup>21</sup> According to al-Tahtawi, the 'ulama's refusal to teach the rational sciences meant that Egypt's progress in the modern world remained severely hampered. For al-Tahtawi, progress was important for two main reasons. The first was connected to his somewhat romantic view of Egypt's ancient past and his longing for modern Egypt to duplicate the monumental achievements of its ancient ancestors. By linking modern Egypt with its ancient past, al-Tahtawi puts forward his idea of the distinctiveness of the Egyptians and the historical continuity of the community. Indeed, he argues that "the physical constitution of the people of these times is exactly that of the peoples of times past, and their disposition is one and the same".<sup>22</sup> The physical and historical continuity of the Egyptian people therefore becomes, for al-Tahtawi, the basis of the Egyptian nation and a reason to once again achieve greatness and to progress in a manner that befits a people with these unique qualities.

For al-Tahtawi, progress is also important for practical reasons and reasons of social utility. The progress of Egypt meant its economic prosperity, which in turn could only be guaranteed through engaging with Europe. However, this had to be from a position of understanding the nature of the modern world and the "European laws of trade, commerce and credit".<sup>23</sup> Government and rulers, he argued, had a responsibility to provide the conditions for economic prosperity and welfare, the existence of which

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<sup>20</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.75.

<sup>21</sup> Jamal Mohammed Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, London, Oxford University Press, 1960, p.14.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.79. See also al-Tahtawi, op. cit. *Manahij*, p.187.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed, op. cit. *Intellectual Origins*, p.14.



would ensure raised living standards and greater satisfaction amongst the community. Al-Tahtawi argued that at the heart of delivering economic prosperity and progress was good and responsible government and in particular virtuous rulers. Without the necessary checks and balances, a function most commonly carried out by the 'ulama, rulers would stray from a virtuous path and abuse their power and authority which would lead to a lack of prosperity for the community as a whole.

Here, al-Tahtawi criticises the 'ulama and their attitude towards non-Islamic education. They are singled out as fundamental to the process of government and the progress of society, not only because of their function as teachers, but also because of their connection to and influence over the ruler. In the realm of education, al-Tahtawi insists that "teaching must be linked with the nature and problems of society",<sup>24</sup> and here the 'ulama's outdated teaching methods, along with their insistence on a purely Islamic education, significantly hindered Egypt's progress. Moreover, their stance on education and their conservative nature was also an important factor in their declining influence over rulers. While al-Tahtawi believed that "the ruler should respect and honour the 'ulama [and] treat them as his helpers in the task of government",<sup>25</sup> he was also acutely aware of how the influence of the 'ulama had declined because of a fundamental difference in outlook with the ruler. Rulers, and specifically Muhammad 'Ali in the Egyptian context, denied the 'ulama their long-established role as vital components of the governing process because of the 'ulama's resistance to change the method and content of their teaching, thereby severely obstructing Egypt's modernisation and prosperity.

It could also be argued that al-Tahtawi was critical of an education system dominated by Islam and the 'ulama because of his favourable attitude towards a specifically Egyptian patriotism. Consistently throughout his work the function of a modern education system is a major theme and one is left in no doubt that, for him, this represented a fundamental cornerstone of a modern, prosperous society. But, his views on education were strongly connected to his ideas on the nature of community and

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<sup>24</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.77.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.75.

particularly the distinction between a religious community and one based on national similarities. The ‘ulama, with their insistence on Islamic education were fostering a community based on religious belief and religious practice but for al-Tahtawi, there was an alternative type of community which was “a national brotherhood over and above the brotherhood in religion”.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, a major theme throughout al-Tahtawi’s work is the idea of the Egyptian nation and its distinctive qualities, which separate it from the Islamic ‘umma based on common religion. The love of country (*hubb al-watan*) is for al-Tahtawi, the “main motive, which leads men to try to build up a civilised community”.<sup>27</sup> The religious bond associated with the ‘umma, while important for al-Tahtawi, never captures his imagination and enthusiasm like that of the Egyptian nation. For him, the bond of nationhood (*wataniyya*), and specifically Egyptian nationhood, is something distinct and continuous, quite separate from Egypt’s position within the ‘umma. This articulation of Egypt as a nation is the first of its kind and, for al-Tahtawi, is based on the continuous shared history of Egypt, its long-standing territorial cohesion and the glories of its ancient past.

While he elevates the national community to the highest level, he nevertheless recognises the importance of other types of community built on different types of bond. For instance, although he sees the historical legacy of Egypt as dating back to ancient Egyptian civilisation, for him the most important event in history was the Revelation and emergence of Islam in the seventh century.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while his work continually manifests a fascination with modernity, and the imperative of embracing modern education, technology and modern forms of community, for him this is always grounded in the traditional, with constant references to Islam, the actions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions – and the justifications these events provide to legitimise engaging with the modern world. In this respect, he was one of the first

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<sup>26</sup> Tahtawi, op. cit. *Manahij*, p.99, quoted in Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.77.

<sup>27</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.78.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.80.

Islamic scholars to attempt to demonstrate Islam's compatibility not only with the emergence of nationalism but with modernity and the western world as a whole.

Although al-Tahtawi died in 1873, nearly a decade before the nationalist 'Urabi Revolt in 1882, there remains little doubt that his ideas were central to the emergence of nationalism in Egypt. The work of al-Tahtawi, both as a translator and as a writer, represents the beginning of Egypt's encounter with the ideas of European Enlightenment thought and these ideas had a profound impact on the transformation of Egypt during the nineteenth century. It is significant also that, in an age where the power and influence of the 'ulama was in rapid decline, al-Tahtawi should find himself at the forefront of Egypt's intellectual transformation. Perhaps his appreciation of the political environment of the time and the fact that he was allied to 'ulama explain why he continued to enjoy the favour of Muhammad 'Ali and his descendants.<sup>29</sup> True as this may be, it is far more important not to lose sight of al-Tahtawi's intellectual engagement with the ideas emanating from Europe about the nature of knowledge and its relationship to society and the individual. In this respect, al-Tahtawi's thought and his intellectual contribution can be seen not as an attempt to sever Egypt from its historical past but of using this past to forge a new, modern, Egypt.

### **Islam and Modernism in the Thought of Muhammad 'Abduh**

There is little doubt that any discussion of Islamic reform in Egypt must include an analysis of the work of Muhammad 'Abduh and his views on the need for Islamic reform and modernisation.

Born in 1849 into a village family of local standing and piety in Egypt's delta region, 'Abduh demonstrated scholarly attributes from an early age and was sent first to study in the Ahmadi Mosque (*Gami'a*) in Tanta and then, from 1869, at al-Azhar, where he completed his studies in 1877 at the age of twenty eight.<sup>30</sup> His early career was, in

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<sup>29</sup> Al-Tahtawi enjoyed a close relationship with Muhammad 'Ali but lost favour and was sent to Khartoum, which al-Tahtawi likened to exile (Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.73).

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (History of the Master and Leader Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh)*, 3 vols., Cairo, Dar al-Fadilla, 2005: see Vol. 1 Part 1, pp.1–24 for background. See also Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*, London, Routledge, 2000; Malcolm H.

part, spent outside the formal 'ulama corps and, aside from his teaching activities at al-Azhar and Dar al-'Ulum, he pursued writing and journalism in the first years after his graduation from al-Azhar. Already during his studies in Tanta and al-Azhar, 'Abduh became acutely aware of the limitations of the education he was receiving, with its emphasis on religious instruction and the imitation and memorising of ideas and views of Islamic scholars from a 'pre-modern' era. During his time at al-Azhar, 'Abduh frequently looked outside the formal al-Azhar structures in order to broaden his intellectual horizon and on one occasion was reprimanded by Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish, a prominent conservative cleric and one of his teachers.<sup>31</sup> However, the experience of meeting the renowned Afghani scholar, Islamic philosopher and moderniser Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and later being part of his inner circle where he studied under him, had by far the greatest intellectual influence on 'Abduh's thought.<sup>32</sup>

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani<sup>33</sup> was one of the most vociferous critics of European penetration and intervention in the Islamic world. He had arrived in Egypt via Turkey in 1871 and initially taught at al-Azhar university. But, after disagreements with a number of prominent al-Azhar 'ulama, he was prevented from teaching there any longer and began holding informal classes and discussion groups in local coffee houses and at his residence in the Khan al-Khalili district of Cairo close to the mosque of al-

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Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1966; Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, London, Frank Cass, 1966; Ahmed, op. cit. *Intellectual Origins*; Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*. 'Abduh graduated in 1877 with the title of 'alim and, although he did not immediately enter the ranks of the formal 'ulama corps, instead choosing to pursue a writing career, he did teach at al-Azhar and was considered a highly qualified and prominent Islamic scholar.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad 'Amarah (ed.) *al-A'mal al-Kamila al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (The Complete Works of the Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh)*, Cairo, Dar al-Sharouk, 1993, *A Conversation with Sheikh 'Illaish*, Vol. III p.210. There are many accounts of the confrontation between 'Abduh and Sheikh 'Illaish. I have chosen 'Abduh's own account, where he admits to reading about the *Nasafi* faith and challenges 'Illaish to "leav[e] everyone's tradition [he means theological schools] aside and using his own logic to explain faith".

<sup>32</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din 'al-Afghani*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1983. See also Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh al-Ustadh*, Vol. 1, Part 1, p.25; Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*.

<sup>33</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh al-Ustadh*, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp.73, 79, 82.

Azhar.<sup>34</sup> Although he no longer taught at al-Azhar, he continued to enjoy the favour of Khedive Ismail and to be paid a salary.<sup>35</sup> During the 1870s, many of the figures who were to play a prominent role in the nationalist movement between 1879 and 1882 attended his classes and were influenced by his ideas. One of these attendees was in fact Khedive Ismail's son, Tawfiq, who later assumed the Khedival throne. The young son of Khedive Ismail was struck by Jamal al-Din's insistence on the need for internal Islamic reform, which deeply influenced him.

Adamant that Muslim society required reform, Jamal al-Din insisted that it must come from Muslims themselves rather than be imposed from outside. He also warned against unquestioned imitation of the west, arguing that this would lead to the abandonment of Islam and greater moral, social and economic decay. To this end, he argued that the foundation for reform must be the wholesale reconstitution of the provision of education in Muslim countries. According to Jamal al-Din, Muslims had for too long received a narrow education based primarily on religion, and taught through techniques of imitation and duplication, which had stifled intellectual rigour and enquiry. By providing a broad-based education which incorporated a religious basis but opened up non-religious fields of enquiry, Muslims would be able to master aspects of the world that would equip them with the necessary tools to embrace the modern world and to understand Islam's compatibility with it, as well as its relevance and indeed role within it.<sup>36</sup>

Jamal al-Din's emphasis on the need for Muslim reform came from the observation that the Islamic world had stagnated and had been overtaken by the western world, leading to large parts of the Islamic world being controlled, either directly or indirectly, by the European Powers, of which Britain and France were the most dominant. His

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<sup>34</sup> Jamal al-Din's dismissal from al-Azhar was most likely on account of his teaching methods and the fact that he refused to follow the traditional curriculum of al-Azhar and sought to study a broader range of topics and scholars than his conservative counterparts would allow: see Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, especially the chapter on Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.

<sup>35</sup> See Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-political Crisis in Egypt 1878–1882*, London, Ithaca Press, 1981 and Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*.

<sup>36</sup> See Ahmed, op. cit. *Intellectual Origins* and Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*.

political activity was aimed at limiting and ultimately ending European dominance of Muslim countries and he believed that, for Egypt, further European control would lead to greater injustice for Egyptians. Arguing in the first instance for greater understanding of the modern world by broadening the scope of education, Jamal al-Din also advocated political agitation against European dominance. In this respect, he saw the use of the emerging printing press in Egypt as a fundamental tool of political agitation to be utilised by Egyptian intellectuals, 'ulama and political groups in order to disseminate ideas of reform, liberation and anti-occupation amongst the Egyptian masses and make them aware of the ills of European interference.

According to Hourani, while 'Abduh and al-Afghani were both concerned with identifying the particular causes of decline and decay of Muslim societies, 'Abduh "was to become a more systematic thinker than his master and have a more lasting influence on the Muslim mind, not only in Egypt but far beyond".<sup>37</sup> Certainly, far more of 'Abduh's writings remain extant than al-Afghani's and, while both men travelled to other parts of the Muslim world as well as Europe, 'Abduh remains far more grounded and indeed connected to Egypt, possibly through his family background but also perhaps through his institutional affiliations to a number of newspapers and journals as a writer and commentator, and to al-Azhar and Dar al-'Ulum,<sup>38</sup> through his teaching activities and his politico-legal roles, first as part of the nationalist movement but later as Egypt's highest legal authority as Grand Mufti. These roles frame 'Abduh's career and were the mechanisms by which he sought to affect the change and reform of Muslim society that he believed to be imperative in order to halt the decline of the Islamic world and re-emphasise the importance of Islam in a rapidly changing and modern world.

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<sup>37</sup> Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.130.

<sup>38</sup> For an analysis of the emergence and impact of Dar al-'Ulum, see Lois A. Aroian, *The Nationalization of Arabic and Islamic Education in Egypt: Dar al-Ulum and al-Azhar*, Cairo Papers in Social Science, Vol. 6, Monograph 4, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 1983; see also Chris A. Eccel, *Egypt, Islam and Social Change: al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1984.

At the core of ‘Abduh’s thought is the idea, shared with al-Afghani, that the Muslim world had declined relative to the west. By the end of the nineteenth century the Muslim world was, in political terms, either directly or indirectly subordinate to the west, with the same being true of the Muslim world’s economic prosperity, technological advancement and military strength. ‘Abduh was concerned with unearthing the reasons behind this decline and subordination and he thought that identifying the cause would enable Muslims to rectify their own situation and allow them to embrace progress and extract themselves from their subordinate relationship to the west. According to ‘Abduh, Muslims had departed from ‘true’ Islam and its teachings and philosophy and, by doing this, had fallen into a condition that ‘Abduh likened to the pre-Islamic condition of *jahiliyya* (backwardness/ignorance).<sup>39</sup> In an article he wrote at the beginning of his career in the newly formed *al-Ahram* newspaper,<sup>40</sup> he claimed that Egypt was in fact in a state worse than pre-Islamic *jahiliyya*, with “hopes for our people’s development diminish[ing]”.<sup>41</sup> Importantly, ‘Abduh refers to the pre-Islamic period as one where “intellectual enquiry into faith or indeed into the details of the universe was vetoed [and where] the principle that reason and religion had nothing in common, but rather religion was the inveterate enemy of science was promulgated”.<sup>42</sup> His criticism of late nineteenth century Egyptian society was based on exactly the same ideas of the divorce of Islam from reason and logic and the absence of rigorous intellectual enquiry in matters of faith and knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid (The Theology of Unity)*, Cairo, Mutba’at Nahdat al Misr, 1956, p.133. Here ‘Abduh summarises the period before the advent of Islam – the period of *jahiliyya* – and states that, although pre-Islamic religions had “laid down for men sacred laws of asceticism and turn[ed] them towards the higher life, men lapsed from its provisions and precepts with concord, cooperation and peace ousted and schism, contention and strife reign[ing] in their place”.

<sup>40</sup> This newspaper was founded in 1875 by two Lebanese brothers, Bashara Taqla and Salim Taqla. See also Latifah Salim, *Sahafat al-Thawra al-‘Urabiyya (The Press of the ‘Urabi Revolt)* Chapter 7 in Nabil Abd al-Hamid and Sayyid Ahmed (eds), *Misr lil Misriyyin: Mi’at ‘Am ‘ala al-Thawra al-‘Urabiyya (Egypt for the Egyptians: Hundred Years on the Urabi Revolt)*, Cairo, Markaz al-Dirasat al-Siyasiyah wa-al-Istiratiyyah bi-al-Ahram (Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies), 1981.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, ‘*al-‘Ulum al-Kalamiyya wa al-Da’wa ila al-‘Alum al-‘Asriyya (Linguistic/Literary Sciences and the Call to Modern Sciences)*’, *al-Ahram*, Issue No. 36, 1877 in Amarah, op. cit. *al-A’mal al Kamila*, Vol. 3, pp.15–23.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Abduh, op. cit. *Risalat*, p.133.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Abduh, op. cit. *al-‘Ulum al-Kalamiyya*, pp.15–23.

In fact, ‘Abduh went as far as to suggest that Muslim populations had lost sight of and become separated from ‘true’ Islam because they had abandoned the use of reason and logic and, just as during the period of *jahiliyya*, Muslims now failed to recognize the idea that Islam could not be practised without logic and reason. According to ‘Abduh, God had given man the ability to speak and think not only for the purposes of understanding the world and the divine order of things but also to use these faculties to develop the world out of its primitive state.<sup>44</sup> The fact that God had created man and the universe did not mean that the universe was static and could not be changed. On the contrary, ‘Abduh argued, man was given reason precisely so that the world (which was God’s creation) could be altered and developed from a primitive state to one where, through understanding and critical evaluation of its characteristics, could be altered and indeed modernised. For ‘Abduh, Islam more than any other religion freed man from the confines of narrow belief and opened a vast horizon of enquiry based on its fundamental compatibility with, indeed insistence on, the use and importance of free reason, critical enquiry and logic.<sup>45</sup>

However, if it was true that at the core of Islam there existed a fundamental compatibility with reason and logic, why, according to ‘Abduh, had this disappeared? And what was behind his notion that Muslims (Muslims in Egypt) had ventured away from the ‘true’ Islam? ‘Abduh first criticised the various developments within Islamic civilisation that encouraged schism and disunity amongst Muslims after the period of the first four *Rashidun* Caliphs. Internal struggles amongst Muslims, between sects and dynasties, followers of the different schools of legal thought and adherence to the different theological schools had all contributed to the emergence of schisms in belief and practice. ‘Abduh first singles out the period during the Abbasid dynasty when the

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<sup>44</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *al-Kitaaba wa al-Qalam (The Art of Writing and the Pen)*, *al-Ahram*, Issue No. 8, 1876 in Amarah, op. cit. *al-A‘mal al Kamila*, Vol. 3, pp.9–15.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Abduh, op. cit. *Risalat*, p.13. See the introduction by Ishaq Musa’ad and Kenneth Cragg in the English translation, *The Theology of Unity*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1966. In the *Risalat*, ‘Abduh includes a chapter entitled ‘Religions and Human Progress: Their Culmination in Islam’ in which he discusses how human progress has relied on free reason and logic as the very drivers of human progress. ‘Abduh argues that Islam and indeed God call for the testing of evidence in establishing truths and universal laws, citing numerous examples from the Quran where God calls for the establishment of truth based on the testing evidence for example, “Say: bring your evidence if you are speaking the truth (Surah 2.111 and 27.64)” (p.134).



Caliphs “became content to possess the title of ‘Caliph’ and ceased to be scholars and trained in religious matters, rejecting the exercise of *ijtihad* (independent reason)”<sup>46</sup> in favour of *taqlid* (imitation) -based learning and scholarship (i.e. the imitation and memorisation of, and adherence to, previously held laws and rules) as the period when disunity befell the Muslims.

A second important phase for ‘Abduh, which leads to the end of the practice of *ijtihad*, was the passing of the Caliphate from Arab to Turkish Ottoman hands. According to ‘Abduh, under Turkish rule Muslims were encouraged to abandon the use of reason and logic as a means to discover ‘truths’ about the world and instead to rely only on those ‘truths’ that had been deciphered for them by previous Islamic scholars and transmitted through the ages by mere imitation and memorisation rather than critical evaluation and the use of independent reasoning and logic. For ‘Abduh, Ottoman control of the Islamic Caliphate suffered from a crisis of legitimacy because it took the institution out of Arab hands and into Turkish hands. This transition of power meant that the centrality of the relationship of Islam and the Arabs was lost and, with it, a proper understanding of Islam, of the Arabic Quran and of the Prophet’s message, who after all was an Arab.<sup>47</sup> The idea that the Turks fundamentally misunderstood Islam and the Prophet’s message and did not represent the ‘core’ of Islam had led to the questioning of their legitimacy to head the ‘umma and, ‘Abduh tells us, as a result, they stifled independent reason and critical free thinking and encouraged blind acceptance of established rules and norms in an attempt to curb internal dissent and protect their own rule. Co-opting and corrupting the ‘ulama became the means by which they achieved this goal as it was the ‘ulama who controlled and were responsible for education, adherence to the Shari’a and determining how Islam would be interpreted and applied in society.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.59; Rida, op. cit., *Tarikh al-Ustadh*, Vol. II, p.282.

<sup>47</sup> Hourani, op. cit., *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*, p.150.

<sup>48</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyya bayna al-‘Ilm wa’l-Madaniyya (Islam and Christianity Between Science and Religion)*, Beirut, Dar al-Hadatha, 1983, p.134.

Clearly, for ‘Abduh, the ‘ulama played a vital role in Islamic society and he returns to the subject of their moral corruption throughout his life and works.<sup>49</sup> For ‘Abduh, the legal, educational and political spheres of Muslim society were intricately connected to each other and at the core of his thought was the belief that Muhammad’s prophetic mission was not only to communicate and spread God’s message but also to build a virtuous community based on divine law as contained in the Quranic revelation. ‘Abduh believed that communities were based on laws that should be understood and recognised by people within the community. As the world changed through the ages, so laws would have to adapt to this change, not merely through imitating legal decisions taken previously by Islamic legal scholars but by using reason, logic and modern methods of interpretation based on Enlightenment rationalism, in order to keep laws relevant to Muslim peoples throughout the passage of time.

The dominance of *taqlid* meant that in matters of legal interpretation and Quranic exegesis, Muslims had yet again moved away from the ‘true’ Islam. So, if laws were the basis of a virtuous community and adherence to divine law ensured orthodoxy and proximity to ‘true’ Islam, for ‘Abduh the question of the interpretation of the divine sources of law became crucial to Muslims if they were to adhere to laws that kept them closely connected to the teachings and message of Islam. It was in this respect that he argued that *taqlid* and its advocates had led Muslims away from true Islam and he laid the responsibility for this firmly in the hands of the ‘ulama.

The debate over whether the practice of *taqlid* was an adequate method of applying laws and rules to Muslim society, particularly in a modern era where many legal questions and issues had no comparable examples in earlier periods, versus the practice and allowable extent of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), went to the heart of the issue of education in Muslim societies and questions concerning its content, delivery and purpose. Put simply, if *taqlid* was to remain the dominant method of legal formulation

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<sup>49</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Al-Islam al-Youm wa’l Ihtijaj bi’l Muslimeen ‘ala ‘l Islam (Islam Today and the Remonstrance of Muslims Against Islam* in Amarah, op. cit. *al-A ‘mal al Kamila*, Vol. 3, pp.330–33. ‘Abduh states here that “nobody can deny how scholars and religious scientists have become too loyal to the opinions of their masters”. The ‘masters’ he refers to are both the political masters and the teaching masters.

and reasoning, the education system must reflect this in ensuring students learnt (and in most cases memorised) legal texts and philosophies of the early Islamic jurists and the ways in which they interpreted the Quran and Hadith in setting the legal and moral code for the Muslim community. If on the other hand, one believed in the necessity of *ijtihad*, as ‘Abduh did, in ensuring that independent reason and logic be used in formulating laws and applying the Quran and Hadith to an entire array of rapidly changing legal and moral issues, the education system in its present state was not fit for purpose.

As well as being responsible for determining pedagogical method and Quranic exegesis in Egypt, the dominance of *taqlid* had important consequences, according to ‘Abduh, for Egypt’s national progress. Since he held that Europe’s domination over Muslim societies, and specifically Egypt, was as a direct consequence of Europe’s embrace of new scientific knowledge and the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment,<sup>50</sup> he attributed Egypt’s fall back into a nineteenth century state of *jahiliyya* to the widespread rejection of scientific learning within al-Azhar and the government schools. In a rhetorical article published at the start of his career in journalism he comments on a group of students who looked beyond the traditional Islamic sciences that were being taught at the time and their attempts to venture into the field of rational scientific enquiry. ‘Abduh tells us that they were told by their families to “stop reading these misleading texts in order that you do not fall into sin and to follow the footsteps and beliefs of [your] fathers and grandfathers”.<sup>51</sup> For ‘Abduh this showed how methods of teaching that insisted on imitation and memorisation went together with an educational content focused on the Islamic sciences and rejection of modern scientific enquiry: they were equally responsible for Egypt’s backwardness and lack of progress.

‘Abduh’s thought and his views on Egyptian and wider Islamic society are important for understanding his association with ‘Urabi and the nationalist movement. Prior to the revolution of 1882, his ideas about Egypt’s backwardness were formed during his

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<sup>50</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *‘Ma huwa al-Fiqr al-Haqiqi fi al-Balaad (What is the Real Poverty in the Country?)*, *al-Wakai’i al-Misriyya*, Issue No. 1073, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1881 in ‘Amarah, op. cit. *al-A‘mal al-Kamila*, Vol. III, pp.45–52.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Abduh, op. cit. *al-‘Ulum al-Kalamiya*, pp.15–23.

time as a student at al-Azhar and in his early career when, along with al-Afghani and others within their intellectual circle, they discussed ways to change the situation and elevate Egypt and the rest of the Islamic world to a position of international envy and prominence. ‘Abduh used the Egyptian press to disseminate his views as widely as possible and, reformist ‘ulama being by no means in the majority, ‘Abduh’s views were opposed vehemently by large parts of the conservative ‘ulama. However, this did not deter ‘Abduh’s prolific writing and publishing and frank assessment of the dominance of conservative ‘ulama and their insistence on *taqlid* based methods of learning and interpretation as being at the root of Egypt’s problems of backwardness and poverty.<sup>52</sup>

Importantly though, rather than impose European laws and education models on Egyptian society, ‘Abduh believed that the solutions to Egypt’s problems lay in its people’s return to ‘true’ Islam. To embrace free reason, science, scientific enquiry and critical evaluation of circumscribed or preordained ‘truths’ was, for him, also to embrace ‘true’ Islam. In this crucial aspect of ‘Abduh’s thought, it is clear to see the role that Islam plays in his attempts to reawaken Egyptian society. Through the return to ‘true’ Islam, now identified with the recognition of the importance of science and scientific knowledge and understanding, Egyptians would be able to overhaul their education system and introduce modern scientific subjects relevant to a modern world. At the same time, a return to ‘true’ Islam would also ensure that the sacred sources of the Shari’a could be properly and critically interpreted using the methods of *ijtihad* and then applied to society as rules for proper conduct and behaviour, thereby ensuring orthodoxy in practice and the continuation of the Prophet Muhammad’s virtuous community.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Tathir al-Ta’lim fi al-Din wa al-‘Aqida* (The Impact of Education on Religion and Faith), *al-Wakai’i al-Misriyya*, Issue No. 1186, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1881 in ‘Amarah, op. cit. *al-A’mal al-Kamila*, Vol. III, pp.57–67.

<sup>53</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Ta’thir al-Ta’lim fi al-Din wa al-‘Qida* (The Effect of Education on Religion and Faith) in ‘Amarah, op. cit. *al-A’mal al-Kamila*, pp.57–67.

### Nation and 'Umma in Marsafi's *Risalat*

The nineteenth century modernisation and transformation of Egypt had allowed greater European penetration of Egyptian society and with this came the influx of new political ideas. The spread of European nationalism in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789) had had a profound impact on the nature of government in Europe where rule by the people and representative government altered Europe's political landscape by replacing the sovereignty of monarchical rule. The appeal of nationalism and its emphasis on the nation as the most ethical form of community, with the right to govern itself, soon spread beyond Europe.<sup>54</sup> In Egypt, new political ideas were quickly adopted as a result of Egypt's constitutional developments and its increasing contact with Europe. Coupled with the expansion of the popular press in particular under Khedive Isma'il, discussion and debate concerning new political ideas linked to local political events increasingly took place in the emerging popular press.<sup>55</sup>

With terms like nation, community and fatherland being used increasingly frequently in Egypt, a prominent Sheikh from al-Azhar thought it necessary to define such terms in order that people better understood them and were able to use them properly. Sheikh Husayn al-Marsafi (d.1890)<sup>56</sup> published his *Risalat al-Kalem al-Thaman* (*Treatise on the Eight Words*) in 1882, the very year of the 'Urabi Revolt. It is important to highlight two aspects of his book that should be considered when looking at its content and that serve to provide important context not only for this book but also the overall significance of al-Marsafi's contribution.

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<sup>54</sup> Elie Kedourie (ed.) *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971.

<sup>55</sup> For an analysis of the emergence of the popular press in Egypt, see a variety of works, including Latifah Salim, *Sahaafa al-Thawra al-'Urabiyya (The Press of the 'Urabi Revolt)*, Chapter 7, in *Misr lil Misriyyin: Ma'a 'aam 'ala al-Thawra al-'Urabiyya*, Cairo, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1981; Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture, 1870–1919*, Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2011; Adnan Hussein Rashid, *The Press and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement in the Nineteenth Century with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Al-Nadim*, PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1987.

<sup>56</sup> Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*. For al-Marsafi's date of death see Meir Hatina, 'Ulama', *Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, UT, University of Utah Press, 2010, p.66. His date of birth is unclear but some scholars, whose sources I have not been able to verify, have estimated this as 1815.

The first important point about al-Marsafi's *Risalat* is the timing of its publication, coming in the year that the 'Urabi Revolt entered its most decisive phase – but also the year when the Revolt itself ultimately failed. The British invasion of Egypt brought 'Urabi's nationalist movement down and restored Khedive Tawfiq to power: the Khedive was widely considered to be under the influence of the British. In fact, the timing of the book's publication marks the culmination of a period of events that saw the emergence of an Egyptian national consciousness through a number of processes and new developments in Egyptian politics, which al-Marsafi, partly at least, attempts to address in his work. So, for instance, the development of an Egyptian constitution had taken place, as had the development of parliamentary politics.<sup>57</sup> While these two crucial developments had not been entirely successful in wresting political control from the Khedive, they nevertheless did stimulate widespread debate about the justification of Khedival rule and the imperative of national self-rule. In this way, al-Marsafi's contribution can be seen as coming at an important juncture where the emergence of nationalism in Egypt and the idea of political independence help to articulate an Egyptian national consciousness and promote a more forceful drive towards political nationalism.

The second important point is that al-Marsafi's book is an attempt by a prominent al-Azhar 'alim to explain key political terms that had come into popular usage. For much of the nineteenth century, almost all the 'ulama remained on the political margins, with successive rulers increasing the distance between Egypt's political institutions and its religious ones (and thereby lessening the influence of the 'ulama). Al-Marsafi's book thus represents a significant turning point for the 'ulama – the fact that a high 'alim from al-Azhar was defining political terms and institutions that the 'ulama themselves had been expelled from or were excluded from participating in. For instance, the 'ulama had been almost entirely excluded from the realms of government and politics and yet here was a prominent 'alim defining these very terms. Similarly, the educational realm had been entirely under the control of the 'ulama but, with the growth of non-religious schools in the nineteenth century, the 'ulama found themselves

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<sup>57</sup> Jacob Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, Tel Aviv, Israel Publishing House, 1953.

being increasingly criticised and in fact marginalised in this sector. Al-Marsafi's *Risalat* ignores this marginalisation and offers a lengthy definition of what an education system should deliver. Most compelling of all is al-Marsafi's definition of the two categories of community with which he begins his book – *al-'Umma* and *al-Watan* – which defy the traditional view of Islam's incompatibility with nationalism and put forward the idea that Islam can in fact live with and accommodate loyalty to the nation. And it is the author's background as a recognised and highly respected member of the al-Azhar 'ulama that elevates the significance of al-Marsafi's *Risalat*.

The *Risalat* offers guidance, definitions and explanations on eight key words that al-Marsafi considers to be in popular usage: *al-'umma* (the nation), *al-watan* (the homeland), *al-hukuma* (the government), *al-'adl* (justice), *al-zulm* (injustice), *al-siyasa* (politics), *al-hurriya* (liberty/freedom) and *al-tarbiya* (upbringing).<sup>58</sup> For the purposes of this study, I will concern myself with the first two terms only as these demonstrate the ways in which al-Marsafi defined and indeed conceptualised these types of communities and their particular traits.

For al-Marsafi, “a nation [al-'umma] is a group of people bound by a certain tie”.<sup>59</sup> According to al-Marsafi, there are three possible ties of a national group, the tie of language, the tie of place or territory and the tie of religion.<sup>60</sup> Al-Marsafi's definitions appear in the first section of his book dealing with al-'umma and it is no surprise that his idea of al-'umma and a national group overlap considerably. In classical Islamic terms, the 'umma was seen to have three important defining features. The first of these was the bonds of religion, where the 'umma was a community of Muslims sharing religious ideals, adhering to a single holy text, accepting the Holy Prophet and indeed all the teachings of this Prophet. Common belief in Islam and the acceptance of its

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<sup>58</sup> Husayn al-Marsafi, *Risalat al-Kalem al-Thaman (Treatise on the Eight Words)*, Cairo, al-Nahda, 1984. The translations given above of the eight Arabic terms are generally widely accepted, with the exception of al-'umma and al-watan, which are highly contentious terms and have been translated in different ways. In this text, I am translating these terms as I feel al-Marsafi would have intended. Al-'umma is widely considered to mean 'community' and al-watan to be 'nation'.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

teachings and traditions meant that all other ties relating to tribe or ethnic group were relegated to a position beneath that of common faith. In al-Marsafi's conception of the nation, the religious tie is an important one where "people follow a Prophet and commit themselves to his laws".<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the nation for al-Marsafi is a religious community and thus his definition shares the religious features of the classical definition of al-*umma*. It should further be recognised that his emphasis on religious ties was not only meant to remind people of the centrality of the *'ulama* to the nation but was also aimed at supporting the native nationalist movement led by *'Urabi* against the prospect of the imminent 'non-Islamic' British invasion of 'Muslim' Egypt.

However, for al-Marsafi by far the most important national bond is the bond of a common language. He insists that the "nation that is bound by language is the most proper one because language comes from within the people".<sup>62</sup> Here, al-Marsafi is perhaps pointing towards the organic qualities of the nation where he draws an analogy between the nation's linguistic foundations and the growth of a tree, arguing that a nation is similar, with an abundant root providing the basis for larger growth and ensuring that, in the event that the tree dies, other trees would certainly succeed it.<sup>63</sup> As well as pointing towards the nation's organic characteristics, he is also raising the question of the nation's authenticity. In arguing that language comes from the people, al-Marsafi's line of reasoning is that the linguistic nation is also the authentic nation because language derives from the people.

The qualities and characteristics of a linguistic nationalism appear frequently in al-Marsafi's work and in a later section, where he talks about the importance of newspapers to the development of the nation, not only is there the presence of a proto-Andersonian conception of the nation being 'imagined' on the back of the development of print capitalism<sup>64</sup> but there is also the insistence that the language in newspapers should be accessible to the public in order to inform and engage the nation because

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>64</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1991.



“when a group of people share the same language, they live in harmony”.<sup>65</sup> Still, overall, the importance al-Marsafi attaches to the linguistic basis of the nation is again reminiscent of classical ideas of the ‘umma. The ‘umma was seen primarily as a religious community and the Arabic language was itself seen as closely tied to the religious community, underlined by the importance of the Quran being an Arabic text recited in Arabic not only by Arab speaking Muslims but also by non-Arabic speaking Muslims around the world. So, despite the existence of non-Arabic speaking Muslims in the ‘umma, the widespread practice and indeed imperative of reading and reciting the Quran in the original Arabic represents an important part of being part of the Islamic ‘umma for all Muslims regardless of linguistic group.

Departing somewhat from a classical definition of the Islamic ‘umma, al-Marsafi puts forward his third basis of a nation, which for him is the idea of a nation being territorially bounded. According to al-Marsafi, “a nation bound by territory means a group of people possessing a piece of land that distinguishes them from other territorial nations like the Egyptian nation or the Hijazi nation”.<sup>66</sup> At first glance, al-Marsafi’s emphasis on an ‘Egyptian nation’ seems at odds with the universalism of the ‘umma. By classifying the nation along particular ‘Egyptian’ or ethno-national lines, his territorial definition appears to contradict the core idea of the ‘umma of transcending tribal, ethnic or national bonds and can even be seen to have the least in common with the classical idea of the ‘umma in that the ‘umma has no borders or fixed territory and in fact territorial boundaries are almost meaningless. More important, when seen within the context of a failing Ottoman Empire and the emergence of an increasingly forceful native nationalist movement in Egypt, al-Marsafi’s assertion, at that particular historical moment, of the existence of an exclusively Egyptian territorial nation would appear to question and indeed defy Egypt’s place within the Ottoman Empire. If the three factors in al-Marsafi’s definition of ‘umma were the bonds of religion, language and territory, the Egyptian nation qualifies under all three criteria. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire would just about fit the criteria under the bond of religion and,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Marsafi, op. cit. *Risalat*, p.7. The Hijazi nation refers to the region of the Hijaz where Islam emerged in the seventh century and which lies on the western side of present day Saudi Arabia.

without explicitly drawing this conclusion, al-Marsafi may well be questioning the legitimacy of the Ottoman Islamic 'umma itself.

While al-Marsafi's emphasis on the territoriality of the nation and particularly his remarks about an exclusively Egyptian nation can be seen to oppose the traditional view of the 'umma, there is nevertheless some evidence to suggest that even the territorial aspect of al-Marsafi's definitions of the nation cannot be taken to be a complete departure from the idea and form of the classical 'umma. Indeed, while the 'Egyptian nation' refers to a relatively undisputed territorial demarcation, it is equally true to point out that even the traditional 'umma had within it a territorial aspect. The *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) was a central feature of classical ideas of the 'umma, as was its opposite the *dar al-Harb* (abode of war).<sup>67</sup> While these demarcations pitted Muslims in the 'Muslim lands' against non-Muslims, either for expansion or defence, they were clearly linked to ideas of territory – on the one hand, the territory of the Muslims and, on the other, the territory of the non-Muslims. In this way, al-Marsafi's insistence on the territorial aspect of the nation can be seen to share some common ground with features of the 'umma. However, the similarities become even stronger where al-Marsafi talks about the defence of the territory of the nation. According to al-Marsafi, "the nation must believe that their land is like one's home [and] they should defend it with their lives".<sup>68</sup> Here, al-Marsafi can be seen to invoke the moral imperative upon all Muslims to engage in jihad in order to defend the integrity of the *dar al-Islam*. By linking the moral imperatives of jihad to the defence of Muslim territory, he is also, almost certainly, making a strong point in the direction of the need to defend Egypt against a non-Muslim British invasion. This can be seen when al-Marsafi insists that "nobody should be allowed in one's home unless for service, visiting or living but even for these purposes there are certain limits".<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in World Civilisation*, Vol. 1: *The Classical Age of Islam*, London, University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp.71–100, 187–230. See also John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.62.

<sup>68</sup> al-Marsafi, op. cit. *Risalat*, p.9.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.6. This passage can be seen to refer to the widespread belief that the Europeans had been allowed to enter Egypt and prosper on the back of Egypt's nineteenth century modernisation and transformation. Alternatively, according to press reports, Egypt's financial crisis and the threat of

In addition to al-Marsafi's idea of the three ties of the nation and their similarity to the features of the classical 'umma, there are two more striking aspects of the *Risalat* worth highlighting here. The first is the prominence of a moral dimension to al-Marsafi's conception of the nation. His definitions not only attempt to make the nation into a moral community but also, for al-Marsafi, human agency, being crucial to the development of the nation, is driven by a moral imperative. In addressing the reasons behind the improvement or worsening of the condition of the nation, he insists that tolerance lies behind a nation's strength and intolerance behind its decline.<sup>70</sup> So, for instance, he repeatedly refers to the need to respect the opinions of others, whether they are the nation's youth or its elders, and insists that the nation should be in constant discussion and consultation with its people, with recognition of people's rights as well as duties towards the nation.<sup>71</sup>

Al-Marsafi addresses the question of rights and duties more extensively in his chapter on *al-watan*. He uses the word *watan* in a broad sense to mean 'homeland' and argues that there exists many different types of *watan*, all serving different and varying purposes. He identifies a public homeland and explains that this is a "piece of land that a community would consider as their place where they would live and work for their land".<sup>72</sup> Similarly, he points out that there also exists a 'private *watan*', which is one's residence; the soul also is *watan* as this is the place where one's feelings reside; the *watan* of the body is where the soul resides, and so on.<sup>73</sup> Clearly then for al-Marsafi, *al-watan* is about residency, where "the house, the district, the village, the country, the world and globe are *watan* because they are places of residency".<sup>74</sup>

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British invasion was a clear sign for many Egyptians that the Europeans and most notably the British had exceeded their limits.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.15.

Conversely, while al-Marsafi's definition of *al-watan* goes beyond the boundaries of the nation, his focus on the rights of the *watan* are emblematic of the rights he sees should be accorded to the nation and he insists that the *watan* has rights that everybody – whether in the public or private domain – has a moral imperative to uphold. So, for instance, in the case of the city and the country, which for al-Marsafi represent two types of *watan*, he insists that while people have civic duties to maintain its streets and roads, the government has a duty to ensure the safety of people and their cattle by limiting the traffic on the roads and providing paths for pedestrians.<sup>75</sup> In a similar way, he argues that the country's rights emanate from the people's sense of civic responsibility, where "everybody should believe that his country needs his time and effort and when people have this feeling, it will benefit their own security and they would never hesitate in helping their own country".<sup>76</sup> In this way, al-Marsafi demonstrates the moral dimensions of the nation (or *watan*) by urging people's actions to be based on moral and ethical principles but also for the nation to be seen as a moral community enshrining the rights of the people.

If al-Marsafi portrays the nation as a moral community, he places Islam and the 'ulama at the centre of this community. Throughout the *Risalat*, he gives example after example of the practices of the Prophet Muhammad to highlight and support his views and opinions about the particular features and imperatives of both 'umma and *watan*. While these two types of community share similar characteristics, it is clear how, for al-Marsafi, the nation's moral robustness stems from its Islamic core and the 'ulama's ability to "call people to do good deeds and dismiss them from doing the wrong ones".<sup>77</sup> Indeed, on the importance of the 'ulama to the nation, al-Marsafi portrays them as representing the historical continuity between the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, through to the early Imams and their methods of legal interpretation, and ending, finally, with the modern 'ulama providing explanations of the Quran and Hadith and moral guidance for the community. In this way, through their

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.19.

understanding and interpretation of the holy texts of Islam, they are able to provide people with a direct link to the original teachings of Islam and a legitimate guide for everyday behaviour.

The bond of a common religion receives by far the most extensive treatment in al-Marsafi's definitions of 'umma. He argues that the nation's bonds grow stronger through "holding fast to the rope of God".<sup>78</sup> For him, the bond of religion not only leads to unity but also ensures that the nation remains just, equitable and fair. However, while the lessons for keeping the community morally and ethically robust can be found in the original teachings and texts of Islam contained in the Hadith and the Quran, al-Marsafi tells us that "people tend to forget and get distracted by other things".<sup>79</sup> By this he means that, by becoming divorced from their religion, the cohesion of the community is weakened and the community loses sight of its purpose and ideal and begins to decay and become weak, making it prone to attack from external forces. This was a common theme among both the conservative and reformist 'ulama at the time, where religious and moral regeneration were seen as the appropriate and necessary responses to modernisation and European penetration. Here, al-Marsafi can be seen to be pointing towards the crisis that Egypt found itself in at the end of the nineteenth century where Egypt faced the threat of British invasion. At the same time, he also points towards the importance of "a group of people for the sake of reforming an entire nation"<sup>80</sup> but it is left unclear to whom al-Marsafi is referring here.

Indeed, for al-Marsafi, the group of people tasked with reforming the nation would almost certainly have included the 'ulama. However, he by no means bundles the entire 'ulama corps together. On the contrary, he admits that, while the "orators of the pulpit [are] more skilled than the public"<sup>81</sup> at interpreting the holy texts of Islam, some are also guilty of merely "memorising words whose meanings they don't

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.21. Here al-Marsafi is referring to the 'ulama and the *minbar*, which is the place within the mosque from which the 'ulama deliver their sermons.

understand”.<sup>82</sup> Looking at the ‘ulama through the lens of history, al-Marsafi claims that the early ‘ulama “established the discipline of the fundamentals of religion [and] purified the authentic pillars of Islam”.<sup>83</sup> Later, the ‘ulama developed legal techniques and methodologies in order to interpret the holy texts and ensure their practical use and applicability as well as their continued relevance to the community. As described above, this era in ‘ulama history was accompanied by the emergence of differences between contending schools of thought and interpretation and these differences often spilt over into violent hostility between opposing groups. At this point, al-Marsafi tells us, the ‘ulama became politicised, as rulers became involved in their infighting and ‘ulama allied themselves to different rulers, thus beginning the process of the ‘ulama’s moral corruption.<sup>84</sup>

According to al-Marsafi, the period when ‘ulama became politicised was brought on by their disunity and what followed was a period where public trust in the ‘ulama declined because, rather than work for the public interest, they were seen to be embroiled in currying favour with the political rulers and indeed under the influence of these rulers.<sup>85</sup> With this process of politicisation came an increasing separation between the nation and its religious ties, with devastating consequences for the strength of the nation. The very bond responsible for the nation’s cohesion was being lost through the disunity of the ‘ulama and their political ambitions. Without a strong unified ‘ulama acting as moral guardians and protectors of the faith, the nation, according to al-Marsafi, will inevitably suffer and become weak. So although he holds the disunity of the ‘ulama as largely responsible for the decline of the nation, it would also be fair to say that, for al-Marsafi, the religious bond that provides a vital cohesive element for the nation does, in fact, derive from having a strong unified ‘ulama corps. Viewed in this way and looking at the emphasis he places on Islam being the moral

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Al-Marsafi here is referring to the widespread practice within Islam of memorising the Quran by heart in an attempt to retain its purity and authenticity by not committing the text to be written down and potentially altered.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.23. Here al-Marsafi is referring to the establishment of the institution of the ‘ulama after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the four *Rashidun* Caliphs.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp.14–16.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

bedrock of the nation, the 'ulama become the sole group of people that protects the very foundations of the nation. They are, in al-Marsafi's opinion, "like Prophets but without Revelation [and] are the guardians of the Revelation who explain its content to the people and educate them through this Revelation".<sup>86</sup>

As was mentioned previously, the *Risalat* must be seen within the context of its historical backdrop. Published in 1882, the year when the nationalist movement of Ahmad 'Urabi emerged as a powerful political force with mass popular appeal, the *Risalat* was not widely read by the population of Egypt and cannot directly take responsibility for the popular appeal of 'Urabi's nationalist movement. The main readership of al-Marsafi's *Risalat* would have been the 'ulama and where the significance of the *Risalat*'s contribution to the nationalist movement can be seen is in its appeal to the 'ulama and indeed other branches of Egypt's intelligentsia. A highly prominent 'alim, al-Marsafi came from a family of eminent scholars and taught Arabic Literature at al-Azhar and later Dar al-'Ulum. He was highly respected by his contemporaries as a brilliant teacher and scholar and can be considered one of the elite or high ranking 'alims of the day.<sup>87</sup>

His status as a high ranking 'alim and pro-nationalist are confirmed by the fact that he was one of the senior 'ulama who signed the fatwa that deposed Khedive Tawfiq as ruler of Egypt in July 1882 (see Chapter 7). With al-Marsafi occupying such a prominent and senior position within the 'ulama corps, the publication of his *Risalat* would have attracted the interest of many 'ulama within Egypt. Along with his prominent status, his engagement with the issues of nationalism, and Egypt's 'national' status in particular, would have been eagerly observed by many of his fellow 'ulama and would have stimulated and encouraged widespread debate of these issues amongst a large number of them.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>87</sup> Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p.135. See also Ahmed, op. cit. *Intellectual Origins*; Hourani, op. cit. *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age*; and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *'Asr Ismail (Ismail's Era)*, Vol. II, Cairo, Matba'at al-Nahdah, 1932.

Whether they agreed with him on his definitions or his observations and views on the nature of the nation and ‘fatherland’ cannot be determined accurately. However, what al-Marsafi’s intervention demonstrates is the commencement of the elite ‘ulama’s participation in the nationalist politics of the day and, indeed, the beginning of their engagement with a nationalist movement that sought to give voice simultaneously to an emerging Egyptian national consciousness as well as a rejection of Ottoman and British imperialism.



## **Chapter 5**

### **The Strategist and the Orator: Islam and the ‘Urabi Revolt**

#### **Muhammad ‘Abduh, Islam and Egyptian Nationalism**

Although it is widely accepted that Sheikh Muhammad ‘Abduh played a prominent role supporting the nationalist movement, his support of ‘Urabi and the nationalists was in no way a straightforward matter. When the nationalist movement was still in its infancy – in fact when it was only a protest movement aiming to acquire greater rights and status for Egyptian army officers in 1879–1880 – ‘Abduh was ruthlessly critical of its aims. In ‘Abduh’s view, ‘Urabi and the rest of the military officers were pursuing narrow self-serving objectives that failed to address the underlying causes of Egypt’s problems, which ‘Abduh believed could only be repaired by reforming people’s minds, changing the education they received and strengthening the legitimacy of the laws under which Egyptians lived. Instead, ‘Urabi and his fellow army officers were protesting over the number of local Egyptian officers permitted in the army and about raising the pay and status of native Egyptian officers to match that of their Turco-Circassian counterparts. Evidently, there was a fundamental and sizeable difference between ‘Abduh’s desire for widespread Islamic reform, albeit beginning within a national Egyptian context, and ‘Urabi’s limited demands for increased rights for local army officers.<sup>1</sup>

‘Abduh’s criticism of ‘Urabi’s movement was based on a number of points of fundamental disagreement. First, ‘Abduh believed that ‘Urabi and his fellow officers came from, and represented, the elite class of native Egyptians and therefore could not truly represent the people of Egypt. According to ‘Abduh, national movements that challenge the authority and legitimacy of dictatorial regimes usually came from an educated middle class or working class background.<sup>2</sup> Of key importance for ‘Abduh here was the matter of education and, while Egypt possessed a middle class and

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Sheikh Muhammad ‘Abduh (History of the Master and Leader Sheikh Muhammad ‘Abduh)*, 3 vols., Cairo, Dar al-Fadilla, 2005, Vol. 1, Part 1, p.147.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.145–57.

working/peasant class, the latter were, for 'Abduh significantly lacking in education. As a consequence, 'Abduh argued that, even if 'Urabi and the army officers were successful in limiting Khedival power and devolving power through parliament to the people, without the mass of the people possessing necessary education and knowledge on how best to use this power, the efforts of the army officers would be counter-productive and highly damaging for the long-term development of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

As well as the premature assumption of power by an uneducated middle/working class who were not yet 'ready' to exercise power in a meaningful way, 'Abduh also argued that the protests of 'Urabi and his fellow officers and their desire to confront the Khedive in order to limit his political authority would, in all likelihood, end in foreign intervention and occupation.<sup>4</sup> For him, this would be disastrous as it would jeopardise the reforms so carefully planned by 'Abduh and his fellow modernisers. Throughout the period of Isma'il's reign (1863–1879), Egypt's parliament, despite huge financial burdens, had been steadily gaining in confidence and authority and was increasingly able to check Khedive Isma'il's rule.<sup>5</sup> Significant changes were being experienced in Egypt's political culture, with a plethora of new newspapers and journals being produced by Egypt's emerging printing press.<sup>6</sup> The political opinions represented in the new newspapers and journals, while not explicitly critical of Khedival rule, did, however, offer wide-ranging views on political, social, cultural and economic matters. Satirical journals were also emerging that were able to offer harsher criticism of the government and the Khedive, albeit disguised under a veil of humour.<sup>7</sup> 'Abduh's

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<sup>3</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, p.147.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See Jacob Landau, *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, Tel Aviv, Israel Publishing House, 1953; see in particular pp.16–22.

<sup>6</sup> Latifah Salim, *Sahafat al-Thawra al-'Urabiyya (The Press of the 'Urabi Revolt)* in Nabil Abd al-Hamid and Sayyid Ahmed (eds), *Misr lil Misriyyin: Mi'at 'Am 'ala al-Thawra al-'Urabiyya (Egypt for the Egyptians: Hundred Years on the Urabi Revolt)*, Cairo, Markaz al-Dirasat al-Siyasiyah wa-al-Istiratiyyah bi-al-Ahram (Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies), 1981; Adnan Hussein Rashid, *The Press and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement in the Nineteenth Century with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Al-Nadim*, PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1987; Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture, 1870-1919*, Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> I refer here to journals of the day such as *Abu Naddara Zarqa (The Man with Blue Glasses)*, *Humarat al-Minyaati (The Idiocy of my Desires)* and *al-Tankit w'al-Tabkit (Witticisms and Criticisms)*. See also

mentor, al-Afghani, had urged the reform minded intellectuals whom he had taught and influenced during his time in Egypt to use the emerging printing presses to disseminate modernist views, which had as their rallying call the reawakening of Islamic societies in order to eliminate the dominance of Europe over them.<sup>8</sup>

The third and perhaps most fundamental difference between the two stemmed from 'Abduh's belief that the transformation and modernisation of Islam that he and other reformers had been calling for during the 1870s would in fact take many years to accomplish. Indeed, it would take generations to change the ways Muslims thought about the world, and for Muslims to accept and understand their religion's compatibility with modern science, the ideals of the Enlightenment and socio-economic and political progress.<sup>9</sup> As for 'Urabi's talk of establishing a truly independent parliament in Egypt for the people, 'Abduh's response was to dismiss 'Urabi's claims, arguing that "the first thing must be education and upbringing (*'ilm wa tarbiyya*) in order to create men capable of practising parliamentary life and who understand how to encourage government to work for the people".<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the animosity between 'Urabi and 'Abduh is reported to have reached dramatic proportions: on more than one occasion 'Abduh's criticisms of 'Urabi's nationalist movement prompted 'Urabi and his followers to exit the room when 'Abduh was present. Some reports stated that 'Urabi's officers had at times actually threatened to

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Jacob Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, New York, New York University Press, 1969 on Yaqoub Sanua; See also Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture, 1870–1919*, Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2011; Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (eds), *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics and Culture, 1893–1958*, Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry and the Brandeis Library of Modern Jewish Thought, 2013 forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Juan R. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.38. The role of the newspapers in the 'Urabi Revolt remains an inconclusive and contentious issue. Most scholars agree on the emergence of newspapers around the 1870s but Cole argues that "the 'ulama did not rush to make use of new media such as the printing press, thus restricting their audience to Mosque congregations and seminary classes" (p.38).

<sup>9</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp.145–57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp.145–46. See also Muhammad 'Abduh, *al-Nisha'a wa al-Tarbiyya wa talib al-'alum* (Upbringing, Teaching and Education) in Muhammad 'Amarah (ed.), *Al-A'mal al-Kamila al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh* (The Complete Works of the Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh), Cairo, Dar al-Sharouk, 1993, Vol. II, p.320.

physically harass 'Abduh, even plotting to assassinate him if he continued to criticise 'Urabi and his fellow officers.<sup>11</sup>

However, although 'Abduh was critical of 'Urabi's self-interested movement, and animosity between the two does appear to have been fierce, over the course of events during the years 1881 and 1882, the two were nevertheless brought closer together. While in the years 1879 and 1880, 'Urabi's movement for Egyptian army officers was by no means a popular nationalist movement and lacked widespread appeal and support, events in 1881 and 1882 moved quickly and, as a result, 'Urabi found himself, by the end of 1881, at the head of a movement that was now nationalist in its demands and, furthermore, supported by a significant proportion of Egyptians of varying social class and background.<sup>12</sup> Far from suggesting a lack of agency on the part of 'Urabi to shape and take advantage of events, it was 'Urabi himself who did indeed alter his demands and make changes to his movement to take advantage of the growing uncertainty of the revolutionary situation, adopting new strategies and forcing all the concerned parties (Britain, the Ottoman Empire and the Egyptian Khedive) to confront nationalist demands and protests themselves driven by 'Urabi and the nationalist movement (see Chapter 6). In this way, 'Abduh's concerns about the representative nature of an anti-Khedral movement and his insistence on its working class foundations seem to have been somewhat satisfied by the fact that 'Urabi's nationalist movement had, by late 1881, gained sufficient mass popular support and could no longer be ignored.<sup>13</sup>

As the revolutionary events of 1881 and 1882 unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that the Ottoman Empire would not support 'Urabi in his struggle against the incumbent Khedive Tawfiq. For 'Urabi and his movement to take on and attempt to depose the Khedive, was thus implicitly go against the wishes of the Ottoman Sultan and thus he needed the support of his own local 'ulama to imbue the nationalist

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<sup>11</sup> Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp.55–56.

<sup>12</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.270; see also Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-political Crisis in Egypt, 1878–1882*, London, Ithaca Press, 1981, pp.311–14.

<sup>13</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.224. See also Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.111.

movement with religious authority. Had the Ottoman Sultan supported 'Urabi and the nationalists, it is likely that 'Urabi would not have appealed to the local Egyptian 'ulama as there would have been no need to do so. The Ottoman Sultan would simply have dismissed Khedive Tawfiq by issuing a *firman* (royal mandate) from Istanbul as he had done in the case of Tawfiq's father Isma'il.<sup>14</sup> But, the Ottoman Sultan was clearly concerned that such a measure might trigger British armed intervention in Egypt in support of Khedive Tawfiq and Britain's own interests. Seeking to avoid a potential conflict with Britain, which would have resulted in certain loss of territory, the Ottoman Empire acted both indecisively and duplicitously, supporting both Egyptian parties and then finally, under British pressure, officially supported Khedive Tawfiq. It is clear, then, that the international dimension of the internal struggle taking place between 'Urabi and Khedive Tawfiq was crucial. In view of the position of the Ottoman Empire, 'Urabi required the support of the Sultan in his confrontation with the Khedive in return for assurances of his and Egypt's loyalty. But, when that was not forthcoming, he turned to the Egyptian 'ulama in order to inject his own nationalist movement with an alternative, religious, authority.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, 'Abduh's support of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement can, in part at least, be explained by his dislike of the Ottoman Empire. For him, the Ottoman Empire and their 'illegitimate' rule over the Muslim people was at the root of Islam's backwardness. For him (see Chapter 4), free critical thinking was suppressed by the Ottoman Empire in order to minimise criticism of the Ottoman authorities. This had led to the gates of *ijtihad* being firmly shut and the dominance of *taqlid* in methods of education and legal interpretation, which was, according to 'Abduh and other reform minded 'ulama, the main reason for the decline of the Muslim world. 'Abduh's dislike of the Ottoman Empire can further be seen in his conversations with the nationalist

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<sup>14</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*; see Chapter 1 for an account of the dismissal of Khedive Isma'il; see also P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Sadat*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmed 'Urabi, *Mudhakiraat al-Za'im Ahmed 'Urabi: Kashaf al-Sataar 'Ain Sur al-Asraar fi al-Nahda al-Misriyya al-Mushhoora bil-Thawra al-'Urabiyya* (Daraasa wa Tahqeeq Dr 'Abd al-Mon'im Ibrahim al-Jami'i) (*The Diaries of the Leader Ahmed Urabi: Unveiling the Secret of all Secrets on the Egyptian Renaissance Known as the Urabi Revolution*) (Studied and edited by Dr 'Abd al-Mon'im Ibrahim al-Jami'i), Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, 2005, Vol. 2, p.684.

sympathiser and English traveller, Wifred Scawen Blunt. Of a number of conversations with Blunt after their initial meeting in 1881, Blunt reports that 'Abduh "detests the Ottomans"<sup>16</sup> and recalls that 'Abduh had told him that "[t]he House of Othman [sic] for two hundred years had cared almost nothing for religion, and beyond the right of the sword had no claim any longer to allegiance."<sup>17</sup> So, as 'Urabi and the nationalists became increasingly nationalist in their outlook and sought to limit any expansion of Ottoman authority in Egypt, 'Abduh's dislike of the Ottomans and their role in hindering Islamic progress became a point of convergence for the two: rejection of Ottoman authority over the Egyptian nation became a common cause for 'Urabi and 'Abduh.

Staying with the international dimension of the revolutionary situation in Egypt during 1881 and 1882: Britain's role in events was further cause for 'Abduh to align himself to the nationalist movement. 'Abduh had always argued strongly for Egypt and the wider Muslim world to extract itself from the control and domination of the western powers. While he greatly admired the progress western nations had made in their intellectual advancement, economic prosperity and political institutions, he adamantly believed that progress in the Muslim world must not be based on blind imitation of the west but on the rediscovery of the true message and nature of Islam. 'Abduh declares that "the Quran is the secret of success for the Muslims and there will be no way for them to return from the state they are in without it".<sup>18</sup> Coupled with the notion of a return to 'true' Islam was 'Abduh's belief that foreign intervention in Egypt had been calamitous and highly exploitative. In an article he wrote in *Waki'i al-Misriyya (Egyptian Events)* while still its editor, he addresses the causes of poverty in Egypt and cautions against foreign intervention in Egypt, stating that "if the hands of intruders penetrate this country they will extract all its wealth and the power that comes with

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<sup>16</sup> Wifred Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1907, p.106.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh in Amarah, op. cit. *al-A'mal al-Kamila*, Vol. 3, p.84.

it”.<sup>19</sup> The increasing prominence of Britain’s interest in Egypt through the debt crisis, Britain’s central role in ousting Khedive Isma’il and replacing him with his son Tawfiq as Khedive in 1879, and the continuous involvement of Britain in order to impose a political solution favourable to its own interests in the years 1881 and 1882 were significant factors influencing ‘Abduh’s decision to move closer towards ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement.

However, it would also be erroneous to attribute ‘Abduh’s support of the nationalist movement solely to these international factors. A key reason why ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement and ‘Abduh’s views on the need for Islamic reform markedly converged in the years 1881 and 1882 was ‘Abduh’s increasingly optimistic view that, through nationalism, and particularly ‘Urabi’s nationalism, Islamic reform and modernisation – in particular the modernisation of education which ‘Abduh believed had to be at the foundation of Muslim reform – could be achieved. ‘Abduh’s entire *raison d’être* was to reform and modernise Islamic institutions and learning, believing that this would then enable, and be the foundation upon which, national regeneration could take place. But, with the success and popular appeal of the nationalist movement occurring before his modernisation and reform had happened, ‘Abduh compromised his insistence on the need for reform and modernisation coming first, now adopting the position that the nationalist movement could be the vehicle by which his wider programme of reforms could be achieved.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, he seems to have changed his views considerably on the issues of foreign domination and occupation. Initially, ‘Abduh had criticised the nationalist movement on the basis that it was likely to prompt foreign powers to intervene more deeply into Egyptian affairs and indeed ultimately lead to occupation. The British along with the French already had considerable interests in Egypt and had made it clear that they were not willing to leave these interests unprotected. Similarly, the Ottoman Sultan, already presiding over a weak empire and worried about eruptions of Arab and local

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<sup>19</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *‘Ma huwa al-Fiqr al-Haqiqi fi al-Balaad* (‘What is the real poverty of our Country?’), *Al-Waki’i al-Misriyya (Egyptian Events)*, Issue No. 1076, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1881 in Amarah, op. cit. *al-A’mal al-Kamila*, Vol. 3, p.45-53. See also Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.49.

<sup>20</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, Vol. 3, p.156; see also Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.53.

nationalisms elsewhere in the Empire, was determined to retain control of Egyptian territory and at the same time send out a firm and clear signal to other groups and imperial subjects that he remained in complete control and would not entertain the break-up of the Empire.<sup>21</sup> Despite 'Abduh having warned of the dangers of foreign intervention and particularly that 'Urabi's tactics were likely to trigger this, nonetheless 'Abduh now came around to the view that the nationalist movement could represent "a step in freeing the country from bondage to foreigners".<sup>22</sup> 'Abduh, then, changed his view of the nationalist movement, no longer seeing it as inviting greater foreign domination and control of Egypt but, rather, as a movement capable of dispelling foreign powers and preventing them from exerting their influence on Egypt and generally offering the greatest hope of political independence for the people of Egypt.

There had also been an important shift in the nationalist movement itself that enabled 'Abduh to throw his weight behind it and clearly illustrating his strategic approach to politics, which was probably heavily influenced by his mentor and teacher Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.<sup>23</sup> The shift can be seen by starting with the phase of 'Abduh's opposition to the 'Urabi movement, an occasion when he was addressing 'Urabi and his fellow army officers in response to their calls for a confrontation with the Khedive and the immediate establishment of a constitutional government in Egypt. 'Abduh first pointed out to them that, while he agreed with them over the issue and, indeed, in the desire for constitutional government, he nevertheless believed the route to achieving this should be through peaceful means and negotiations with the Khedive rather than engaging in conflict with him.<sup>24</sup> 'Abduh criticised them further on this issue and accused them of being politically naïve and of acting in their own self-interest by leading a revolt in the name of the 'people' without actually representing

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<sup>21</sup> On Arab nationalism, see Yousef Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History, Nation and State in the Arab World*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000 and Sylvia Haim (ed.) *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962.

<sup>22</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, Vol. 3, p.82. See also Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.53.

<sup>23</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp.25–35, 73–87.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.56.



the particular interests of the poorest classes in Egypt. In a blistering attack on 'Urabi and the other leaders of the movement, he asks ironically how they have come to represent the people and what kind of equality do they wish to achieve? 'Abduh asks 'Urabi and his fellow army officers:

*Have you upset the custom which God has followed with his creatures, and has the order followed by human society been reversed? Has virtue reached a perfection with you that no one else has ever attained, so that, of your own choice and willingly, with full vision and understanding, you have decided to make the other members of your nation sharers with you in your power and glory, and put yourselves on an equality with beggars, out of love for justice and humanity? Or are you following a course of which you are ignorant, and doing that which you do not understand?*<sup>25</sup>

'Abduh's disdain for 'Urabi and his fledgling movement is clear. The overwhelming evidence suggests that, even very late on, just before the Khedive was deposed by the *Majlis al-'Urfi* in July 1882, 'Abduh still opposed open confrontation with the Khedive and, more important, was against armed conflict to secure the demands of the revolutionary movement. On this point, 'Abduh's disciple and biographer Muhammad Rashid Rida, explains, in hagiographic terms, 'Abduh's stance when he states that 'Abduh "was the opponent of the military revolution even though he was a directing spirit to the intellectual movement".<sup>26</sup> Rida is likely referring to 'Abduh's widely accepted role as a leading Islamic modernist figure and its connection to the 'Urabi movement. However, the nationalist movement did evolve into a broad-based movement that sought to establish greater independence for Egypt by strengthening Egypt's political institutions and making the Khedive more accountable to his people, and by seeking to limit the power and influence of both the Ottoman Empire and the European powers in the affairs of Egypt. Most important of all for 'Abduh, 'Urabi and the nationalist movement had evolved into a genuinely national movement representing the demands and aspirations of Egyptians of all classes, religions and social backgrounds: it was only when it was clear to 'Abduh that the nationalist movement was "free from personal aims"<sup>27</sup> and was "following the course of reform

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<sup>25</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, pp.147–48. See also Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.56.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Adams, op. cit. *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p.54.

<sup>27</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, Vol. 1, p.156.

and demanding justice and equality”<sup>28</sup> that ‘Abduh supported ‘Urabi and the nationalist movement.

Even though ‘Abduh began as a vociferous opponent of the nationalist movement, the aims and attitudes of both converged significantly in the years 1881 and 1882. From here onwards until it finally collapsed in September 1882, his influence on the nationalist movement was as important as any of its leaders: Rida once again in hagiographic terms states “that ‘Urabi’s followers never made any plans without consulting ‘Abduh first”.<sup>29</sup> His influence on the direction, trajectory and tactics the nationalist movement employed was not, however, the only way in which he was central to the movement. Indeed, people all over Egypt read his articles in the government newspaper *Waka’i al-Misriyya*, as well other newspapers and journals, in the period prior to and immediately leading up to the revolution; taken together, his commentaries had a significant impact on the way people conceived of the Egyptian nation. His writings often pointed towards the uniqueness of the Egyptians in linguistic terms just as much as in historical terms, also invoking particular national characteristics such as being hard working, loyal, humorous and eternally welcoming.<sup>30</sup> He also drew particular attention to Egypt’s unique landscape and territoriality, asserting that “the habitable land is surrounded by dry deserts and salty waters”<sup>31</sup> that demarcated its territory by easily identifiable and immovable geological factors that all gave a sense of a geographically bounded and historically continuous territory.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp.10, 120. ‘Abduh’s importance to the movement can also be evidenced by his formulating the National Party Declaration/Manifesto, which was sent via the nationalist sympathiser Wilfred Blunt to British Prime Minister Gladstone and later published in *The Times* newspaper. (See Chapter 6 for an analysis of the Declaration).

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Tabi’a Misr wa’l Misriyeen* (‘The Nature of Egypt and the Egyptians’) in Amarah, op. cit. *al-A’mal al-Kamila*, Vol. 3, pp.111–13. Here he also asserts that the “people of Egypt do not migrate and have inhabited their own lands for thousands of years and people who migrated to Egypt took on Egyptian characteristics and soon forgot their own national characteristics”.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.111.

In defining the Egyptian nation, however, his most striking contributions must be his continuous insistence on the rights and duties of its citizens and his views on the centrality of Islam to the Egyptian nation. In what was a continuous thread through the entire body of his work either as Grand Mufti, or as a teacher, writer or indeed as a political activist, he never deviated from his deep-seated belief that a return to the original and true message and nature of Islam was the only way to guarantee national regeneration and progress for the Egyptian nation. While it was accepted that various tribal and ethnic categories existed, Islam superseded these loyalties and “prevented this tribalism and made people equal”.<sup>32</sup>

### **‘Abdallah al-Nadim – His Early Career**

If ‘Abduh was widely acknowledged as the strategist for the nationalist movement after he joined them in late 1881, ‘Abdallah al-Nadim (b.1843, d.1896)<sup>33</sup> was without doubt the movement’s propaganda and public relations machine. He was born in Alexandria and his early education was in the mosque school of Sheikh Ibrahim Pasha, also in Alexandria, where he displayed a tremendous literary aptitude and excelled in the subjects of classical Arabic, poetry and prose, contrary to his father’s wishes.<sup>34</sup> He arrived in Cairo for the first time in 1861 and, although he worked in a telegraph office, he attended various free classes in language as well as theology at al-Azhar and was taught by prominent ‘ulama such as Sheikh Muhammad al-Imbabi, who was later appointed Sheikh al-Azhar in late 1881.<sup>35</sup> But, more than these classes at al-Azhar, al-

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<sup>32</sup> Muhammad ‘Abduh, Fatwa entitled *Fi al-Jinsiyya wa’l-Qawmiyya* (‘On Citizenship and Nationality’) in *Amarah*, op. cit. *al-A’mal al-Kamila*, Vol. 2, pp.505–08.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Ali al-Hadidi, *‘Abdallah al-Nadim: Khatib al-Wataniyya* (‘Abdallah al-Nadim: Voice of Nationalism), Cairo, al-Nashr, 1960. Charles Wendell, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image: From its Origins to Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1972, p.140. Wendell gives al-Nadim’s year of birth as 1845 whereas al-Nadim’s diaries say it is 1843. It is difficult to ascertain which date is the correct one but there is general agreement amongst scholars that the year of his death is 1896.

<sup>34</sup> Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p.140. See also Muhammad Ahmed Khalaf Allah (ed.) *‘Abdallah Al-Nadim wa Mudhakiraatal-Siyasiyya* (‘Abdallah al-Nadim and his Political Memoirs), Cairo, Al-Maktaba al-Anglu al-Misriyya, 1956, p.143. According to al-Nadim’s diaries, his father wanted him to pursue a legal juristic career and indeed al-Nadim did study the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) in his early years at Sheikh Ibrahim Pasha Mosque school.

<sup>35</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi’i, *al-Thawra al-‘Urabi w’al-Ihtilal al-Ingilizi* (The ‘Urabi Revolt and British Occupation), Cairo, al-Nahda Publishing House, 1937, p.164.

Nadim was drawn to the literary forums, discussion groups and intellectual gatherings<sup>36</sup> taking place on the fringes of the formal classes, where he came into contact with 'ulama, intellectuals, writers and poets and discussed with them not only the issues of the day but the nature of the Arabic language, its departure from classical Arabic and the role of literature and poetry. Like 'Abduh, al-Nadim was also a disciple of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and attended al-Afghani's discussion groups regularly and was greatly influenced by his teachings and philosophy.<sup>37</sup> As discussed earlier in this chapter, while the key element of al-Afghani's philosophy was the need for wholesale reform of Muslim society and its institutions, he stressed in equal measure, the need for political action in order to implement reforms. And, if 'Abduh gave al-Afghani's ideas greater coherence and structure, al-Nadim was largely responsible for implementing al-Afghani's ideas on political action and agitation.

In many respects, al-Nadim's training and career follow a similar path to that of 'Abduh. For instance, al-Nadim, like 'Abduh was disillusioned and dissatisfied with the formal teaching that was being given in the government schools and sought intellectual fulfilment either outside the formal school structures and classes or, in al-Nadim's case, by abandoning traditional Islamic studies and pursuing his interest in poetry and literature. Their careers are also somewhat similar in that they both began writing and initially pursued careers in journalism. But, while 'Abduh's journalism is associated with his early career, al-Nadim remained a writer throughout his life. Indeed, al-Nadim's work within the broad definition of being a writer is impressively varied and includes a literary output that includes writing and editing numerous journals and newspapers, poetry, novels and some of the first Arabic plays and theatrical dialogues. Unfortunately, while most of 'Abduh's writings are still available, most likely because he occupied official government positions and perhaps because his disciple Muhammad Rashid Rida compiled and collected his works after 'Abduh's death, the same cannot be said of al-Nadim's work. Very few of his writings

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<sup>36</sup> Landau, op. cit. *Parliaments and Parties in Egypt*, Part 2, Chapter 2 (The Secret Societies), pp.73–84. See Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, pp.133–63 for a discussion of the emergence of political fora, clubs and secret societies.

<sup>37</sup> Khalaf Allah op. cit. *'Abdallah Al-Nadim*.

remain and what exists is almost never complete. So, although al-Nadim was a prolific writer and editor, it is unfortunate that many of his writings before and during the years 1879–1882 have either been lost or are difficult to locate with the exception of his journal *al-Tankit wa'l Tabkit*.<sup>38</sup>

Al-Nadim's reputation as a great debater and speaker within intellectual circles emerged in the 1870s but his writing and journalism began to earn him great respect – and notoriety – from around 1878 onwards. It was around this time that he met al-Afghani and began writing in and editing two journals, which were pro-Islamic and pro-nationalist in nature and which sought to increase the powers of the newly formed parliament while at the same time limiting the power of Khedive Isma'il. In al-Nadim's own words, the owners of the two journals – Adib Ishaq and Salim al-Naqqash – asked al-Nadim to edit the journals *Misr (Egypt)* and *al-Tijara (The Business)* in Alexandria, which had become Egypt's publishing centre; al-Nadim accepted "since the journals matched my own beliefs".<sup>39</sup> These journals were concerned with highlighting the desperate financial situation Egypt found itself in and the hardship felt by Egyptians due to Egypt's debt crisis. They focused on the role of the European powers and particularly the Dual Control, by France and Britain, of Egypt's financial obligations, arguing that this was the first step towards foreign occupation and control of Egypt by the European powers. Editorial comment also often questioned the role of the British in India and the French in Algeria and concluded that not only were these European powers intervening in Egypt as an extension of their own imperial policies but that British and French imperialism had not brought any benefits to the people of India and Algeria: if Egypt allowed itself to

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<sup>38</sup> The major and most authoritative Arabic work on al-Nadim is 'Ali Hadidi's *'Abdallah al-Nadim: Khatib al-Wataniyya*, op. cit. This work relies heavily on the journal al-Nadim established, wrote for and edited between June and September 1881, entitled *al-Tankit w'al-Tabkit* (translated variously as *Banter and Blame* or *Witticisms and Criticisms*; see also Abdul Mun'im Ibrahim Gami'i, *'Abdallah al-Nadim*, PhD thesis 'Ayn Shams University, Cairo, 1980. Most of the English works on al-Nadim rely on Abd al-Fattah al-Nadim (ed.) *Sulafat al-Nadim (In the Company of al-Nadim)* Cairo, Matba'a Hindiyya, 1901–1914; see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in a Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001 and Wendell op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*. These English works are by no means comprehensive treatments of al-Nadim's work and thought, offering no more than a few pages on him.

<sup>39</sup> Khalaf Allah, op. cit. *'Abdallah al-Nadim*, pp.53–54. See also Rashid, op. cit. *The Press and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement*.

be occupied by Britain and France, Egyptians would find themselves suffering the same fate as other colonised peoples around the world.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that the anti-colonial views expressed by al-Nadim in *al-Tijara* and *Misr* also included criticism of Khedive Isma'il, calling for him to be replaced by his son Tawfiq who was seen as being sympathetic to the ideas of political reform and limiting the power of the European Dual Control.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, al-Nadim's nationalism can be seen as a response to British and French attempts to colonise and occupy Egypt.

Al-Nadim's nationalism was evident not only in his early writings but also in his other political activities. *Misr al-Fatah* (Young Egypt)<sup>42</sup> was a secret nationalist movement that al-Nadim came to know of and join around 1878. The main aim of the organisation was to end the rule of Isma'il and to assign greater powers to the parliament. In nationalist terms, *Misr al-Fatah* also aimed to halt the steady encroachment of European domination and penetration of Egypt and bring to ascendancy the native Egyptian political elite from which *Misr al-Fatah* sprang.<sup>43</sup> Because of the sensitivity of the issues that *Misr al-Fatah* advocated – the overthrow of Khedive Isma'il – and the risk of being imprisoned by Khedive Isma'il's spies, the organisation was forced to operate in secret. Although al-Nadim fully supported the movement's aims, he disagreed with the clandestine and secret nature of its operations, believing that the organisation only served the interests of its elite members and that *Misr al-Fatah's modus operandi* should be more visible with the aim of raising mass

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Hadidi, op. cit., *Khatib al-wataniyya*, pp.78–79; see also Latifah Salim, *The Press of the 'Urabi Revolt*; Rashid, op. cit. *The Press and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement*.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Hadidi, op. cit. *Khatib al-wataniyya*, pp.78–79.

<sup>42</sup> Based along the same lines as the Young Turks movement in Ottoman Turkey, which sought to diminish the power of the Sultan, elevate and establish greater powers for the Turkish Parliament. The Young Turks also sought to end the penetration of European influences in Turkey.

<sup>43</sup> See Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh*, Vol. 1, p.75. Some of the members of *Misr al-Fatah* are mentioned here, including Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Adib Ish'aq, Salim al-Naqqash and Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh. Rida recalls that many of its members were of Jewish origin. See also Landau, op. cit. *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*.

public awareness.<sup>44</sup> Unable and indeed unwilling to compromise on what was for al-Nadim a fundamental issue, he left the organisation after a matter of months.

Convinced of the need to raise mass public awareness around the issue of Egypt's fall into European hands, the seriousness of the Debt Crisis, and the general decline of Egyptian society, al-Nadim launched a charitable foundation, whose aim was to develop a nationwide network of schools that would be able to provide free education to the poor.<sup>45</sup> In the same way as 'Abduh believed the provision of education to be crucial in order to develop a generation of informed and educated Egyptians able to understand the modern world and define Egypt's place within it, al-Nadim saw the provision of education amongst the poor as crucial to the success of a native nationalist movement. For al-Nadim, a national education was the cornerstone and very foundation of the national community: it would enable the people of the nation to share a common set of understandings around religious and social issues and cultivate "national and patriotic feelings in their hearts".<sup>46</sup> Coupled with the importance of a 'national' education was the need to inform the wider public of national events, of communicating and disseminating national issues to the people of the nation and of forming national public opinion on a particular cause or issue. For al-Nadim, being part of the nation meant that members of the nation speak the same language, discuss national events and imagine themselves, through mass communication to share a common history and heritage as well as a common vision of their national future.<sup>47</sup>

For al-Nadim, the low literacy rates, especially among the lower classes in Egypt, meant that the emerging newspapers and journals had only a limited potential to inform and mould mass public opinion. Because of this, al-Nadim not only gave classes in Arabic, basic reading and writing but also in public speaking, art, literature and drama – all forms of communication he hoped students would use for the purpose of

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<sup>44</sup> Al-Hadidi, op. cit. *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, pp.80–81.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>46</sup> *Al-Tijara*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1879, reprinted in al-Hadidi, op. cit. *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, pp.85–86.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Hadidi, op. cit. *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, pp.86–87.

“heightening national feelings and raising national consciousness”.<sup>48</sup> Although the school was successful with over four hundred students enrolled<sup>49</sup> and later a second community school opened for children from Egypt’s Coptic community, al-Nadim’s foundation never reached the national scale he had envisaged and al-Nadim’s own skills as a stimulating public speaker and a fluent and accessible writer were to have a far greater influence on public opinion and impact on the nationalist movement. What his schools project does demonstrate, though, is his belief in the need to cultivate an Egyptian national consciousness through education and through mass communications,<sup>50</sup> which was evident in his work throughout his life and particularly during the period of the nationalist movement.

### **Al-Nadim – Orator of the Nationalist Movement**

Khedive Isma’il’s departure and the installation of his son Tawfiq as Khedive in 1879 marked the beginning of a period of hope for the nationalist movement but this hope was short lived. Khedive Tawfiq, having been elevated to the Khedival throne primarily through British insistence and Ottoman compliance, was never able to act independently and in favour of the native nationalist movement as ‘Urabi and the other nationalists had hoped. Consequently, Tawfiq’s government, headed by Ryad Pasha, was continually criticised by the Egyptian pro-nationalist press, particularly *al-Tijara* and *Misr*, which al-Nadim continued to edit in the early years of Tawfiq’s reign. Even though the government controlled its own press corps which bolstered the government’s policies and acted as its mouthpiece, Ryad Pasha nevertheless felt the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.87. It appears that this has been taken from the speech al-Nadim gave at the opening of the foundation school in Alexandria on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1879 but no reference details are given.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Abdallah al-Nadim, *al-Tankit w’al-Tabkit (Witticisms and Criticisms)*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1881, Issue No. 6, p.92.

<sup>50</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1991 for a discussion of the importance of mass communications and print capitalism for the development of nations and nationalism.



need to shut down numerous anti-government newspapers, including *al-Tijara* and *Misr* in November 1879.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Nadim criticised the government for its complicity with, or more precisely its ineffectiveness to resist, greater European penetration of Egypt. For al-Nadim, the consequences of Europe's presence in Egypt were plain for all to see and his writings most of all attempt to draw attention to the role Britain and France played in Egypt's decline. In June 1881, al-Nadim established the journal *al-Tankit wa'l-Tabkit* (*Witticisms and Criticisms*) which was to become synonymous with the nationalist movement itself.<sup>52</sup> Its style was satirical and al-Nadim writes that "[W]hen it appears to criticize, it actually makes fun and when it appears to praise, it actually attacks".<sup>53</sup> Most probably, this style was adopted in order to divert the attention of the authorities, hence the tactic of overtly heaping praise on the Khedive as a means criticising his actions. But it was also a reflection of al-Nadim's own personal style of rhetorical engagement and ironic argumentation that is evident throughout his work and the fragments of his speeches that remain. Nevertheless, his writings in *al-Tankit wa'l-Tabkit* and his speeches during the period of the nationalist movement of 1881 and 1882 are the best illustration of the precise shape and contours of al-Nadim's nationalism and deserve special attention here.

National regeneration and the reawakening of an Egyptian national consciousness were at the heart of al-Nadim's thought. For al-Nadim, it was important to assert Egyptian traits of national identity because these characteristics appeared lost and

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<sup>51</sup> Numerous anti-government newspapers and journals were shut down in what was a cynical attempt at silencing anti-government sentiment. Other publications include *Abu Naddarra Zarqa* and *Misr al-Fatah*, with both owners and editors Yaqoub Sannua and Adib Ishaq exiled.

<sup>52</sup> The first issue of *al-Tankit wa'l-Tabkit* was published on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1881 and soon became one of a number of pro-nationalist newspapers and journals. Over its short life-span – its final issue (Issue No. 19) was published on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1881 – the journal became very popular (al-Nadim himself writes in the second issue that 3,000 copies of the first issue were printed and only 5 copies were not sold) and, indeed, the leading pro-nationalist newspaper. As a result, when 'Urabi was Minister for War, he proposed in a letter to the National Publications Department that *al-Tankit wa'l-Tabkit* be given the new title of *Jaridat al-Umma* (*Journal of the Nation*). See the letter written by Ahmed 'Urabi and published in *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1881, Issue No.19, p.306. I was not able to locate any of these copies but it seems that it al-Tankit's title was in the end changed to al-Taif (The Scout), see chapter 7 of this thesis.

<sup>53</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, 'Announcement', *Al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, Issue No. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1881.

forgotten under European influence and domination. The power and influence of Europe had brought with it economic misery and hardship for many Egyptians but, equally important for al-Nadim, was the cultural and religious dilution of Egyptian society under the impact of European penetration. In the very first issue of *al-Tankit wa'l-Tabkit*, a fictional story appears of an Egyptian diagnosed with the disease of westernisation. In the article, entitled 'Medical Diagnosis for Someone Infected with the Western Disease',<sup>54</sup> Al-Nadim tells of a young healthy Egyptian man being led astray by somebody posing as a friend. The imposter leads him away from the company of wise men and intellectual debate into the squalor of the market where he is shown prostitutes and is enticed, after some resistance, into participating in immoral deeds and actions. His resistance is broken only when he sees his fellow countrymen engage in similar behaviour. As a result, he contracts syphilis and falls ill. Doctors try to cure him and warn the ill man's friends, who have gathered around him, to be vigilant of imposters and their immoral influence.<sup>55</sup>

The story acts as a metaphor for the crisis Egypt finds itself in and which remains the backdrop for a nationalist awakening, with many obvious references to the causes, victims and conspirators of Egypt's situation. The imposter in the story is clearly the role al-Nadim attributes to the European powers corrupting and damaging the Egyptian nation. But, al-Nadim's story also illustrates other interesting and perhaps more nuanced aspects of his nationalist outlook. Al-Nadim's insistence that, although initially led astray, the young Egyptian man only succumbs to the temptation of the market when he sees others similar to him do the same thing. Here is the idea of collective responsibility for the fate of the nation. Al-Nadim characteristically attempts to show that, if the nation's decline is because of its people's inability to resist European influence, it is the Egyptian people collectively who ultimately bear the responsibility to arrest their nation's decline. At the same time the collective responsibility that al-Nadim points towards also implies a shared understanding of the underlying characteristics of the nation and the shared values of the community. In al-

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<sup>54</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, 'Medical Diagnosis for Someone Infected with the Western Disease', *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, Issue No. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1881, pp.4-6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp.4-6.

Nadim's narrative, while the Egyptian man follows his fellow Egyptians in their immoral acts, these same fellow Egyptians also surround him, seeking his recovery and imploring the doctors to cure him.

If collective responsibility was an important aspect of national regeneration for al-Nadim, then equally important was the idea of retaining those features that were at the core of an Egyptian national identity. First among these was the linguistic homogeneity of the Egyptian people and their inseparability from the Arabic language. According to al-Nadim, one of the main defects that had developed in Egyptian society during the period of European penetration was the dilution of the Arabic language. In his rhetorical style, he criticised the introduction and proliferation of foreign non-Arabic words in Egyptian society in an article in the second issue of *al-Tankit*.<sup>56</sup> There he emphasised the link between the Arabic language and Egyptian national identity and argued that he “who abandons his language gives up his homeland (*watan*)”.<sup>57</sup> A consequence of European penetration in Egypt, and indeed of greater contact with Europe as a whole, was the steady abandonment of Arabic and the adoption of European languages such as English or French among the native elite. In addition, Egypt's status as part of the Ottoman Empire also meant that Turkish was also prominent in the bureaucracy and official circles. According to al-Nadim, this had profound implications not only in terms of Egyptian national unity but also for the social fabric of the nation.

Al-Nadim was critical of the emerging native elite who increasingly saw their use of European languages as a sign of their social ascendancy. In al-Nadim's view, national language went together with national traditions and customs and, without these, the very social fabric and sustenance of the nation was threatened. So, when a nation's language is being eroded, its traditions and customs no longer have the same importance and it becomes only a matter of time until they become obscure and meaningless. This process had already begun in Egypt and al-Nadim tells the story –

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<sup>56</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, 'Losing One's Language Leads to Submission', *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, Issue No. 2, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1881, pp.19–21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

perhaps fictitious – of a boy sent to Europe to study who, on his return to his native village, is disgusted and ashamed of his father's welcoming behaviour. Rather than responding to the traditional Egyptian greeting of kissing his son on the cheek, the son asks his father merely to shake hands. The Europeanised son has also forgotten his native language and is unable to communicate with his own family.<sup>58</sup> Clearly then, for al-Nadim, language was an important cornerstone of Egyptian national identity and its retention was also vital for national traditions and customs to flourish and continue to be meaningful for members of the nation.

As well as being a mechanism to protect and strengthen national traditions and customs, al-Nadim also insisted that the importance of language lay in its ability to communicate, inform and provide cohesion to the nation. Here, Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagining the nation' through language and the rise of print capitalism<sup>59</sup> is reflected in al-Nadim's assertion that the popular press, public speeches and other communication methods are crucial to the development of nations and nationalism. Al-Nadim was aware that, although the Egyptian press was emerging and publications were multiplying all over the country, there remained many obstacles to and constraints on raising mass popular awareness of the need to mobilise against greater European domination and to forge nationwide support for the rising nationalist movement. Greatest among these constraints was the low level of literacy among both the rural and urban lower classes. Coupled with this, al-Nadim was convinced that, for the nationalist movement to be successful, it had to represent and be supported by the rural and urban lower classes,<sup>60</sup> who represented the overwhelming majority of the Egyptian population. Considering these constraints, al-Nadim chose to use a variety of communication methods as well as the printed word to reach his audience, another

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<sup>58</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, 'A Westernised Arab', *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, Issue No. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1881, pp.7–8.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, op. cit. *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Nadim's writings in this period (1879–1882) represent the urban and rural lower classes effectively. In *al-Tankit wa'l-Tabkit*, almost all the characters in his stories are from this class and, when he uses members of the elites for his characters, they are always portrayed as oppressors, except those who are part of the nationalist movement. See, for instance, an extract from a play al-Nadim wrote, entitled *al-Watan (The Homeland)*, which appears in Abd al-Fattah al-Nadim, op. cit. *Sulafat al-Nadim*, Vol. 2, pp.33–63.

facet illustrating the importance he placed on sharing and maintaining a common national language.

In order to engage his target audience, the choice of subject matter was of primary importance. Looking through his writings and speeches, the first noticeable feature is the way he addresses the real problems that people were facing. Social tensions, economic hardship and political alienation were all issues that al-Nadim regularly wrote and spoke about and, in this way, he was able to build a dedicated and cohesive national audience who identified closely with the issues that al-Nadim was raising and as a result became increasingly politicised. Straying into the realms of Arab nationalism, as he often did, al-Nadim captures the feeling many Egyptians (and Arabs for that matter) would have had at a time when much of the Arab world was under colonial rule. He calls the Egyptians to react to:

*a call from a brother who drinks humiliation and eats injustice. When he sleeps, the threat of theft covers him and when he wakes, the sun of hostility rises to remind him of his pitiful status. So, he continues to walk in the streets staring at the ground, wearing the shoes of fear and the coat of horror. He continues in the hope of being rescued one day. He serves his masters without reward and waits for them to be pleased. Poverty shows him no mercy and he even loses the very clothes he wears. He finds himself in prison and manages merely to stay alive. We are all this man.*<sup>61</sup>

As well as focusing his attention on everyday themes and concerns felt by Egyptians, the particular language he used is also a key feature of his writings and speeches. Rather than the standard written Arabic (fusha), predominantly used in the popular press, official government communications and religious sermons and speeches, and which was highly complex, al-Nadim wrote in a colloquial style ('ameyya), which was specifically Egyptian (rather than coming from other Arabic-speaking territories) and was everyday usage for the urban and rural lower classes.<sup>62</sup> By using the colloquial form of Arabic, particularly in *al-Tankit* and his speeches, al-Nadim was able to ensure

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<sup>61</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, 'Al-Dibaa wa al-Arab (The Dibaa and the Arabs)', *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, Issue No. 19, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1881, pp. 307–15. This article by al-Nadim is a response to a column in the French journal *The Dibaa* by Sharm Gabriel who criticised the nationalist movement in Egypt. I have searched for the French journal and its author without success.

<sup>62</sup> 'Ali Al-Hadidi, *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, p.111.

that what he had to say was widely accessible to a national audience. Indeed, because of the low literacy rates in Egypt, the language al-Nadim employed meant that copies of *al-Tankit* were often read to audiences in coffee houses and other social forums as a form of entertainment, which fulfilled the twin functions of informing audiences of national political events while, at the same time, developing a national consciousness around which support for the nationalist movement could be activated.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, al-Nadim's method of communicating national issues to a national audience also shows that he was acutely aware of the limits of the national education system and its ability to furnish people with basic literacy skills. In this respect, al-Nadim's works, span a variety of different mediums all aimed at informing and influencing his target audience.<sup>64</sup> So, for instance, rather than restrict himself and his message to being disseminated through the publication of his *al-Tankit*, al-Nadim informs people of a variety of ways in which they can engage politically and inform themselves of the injustices they are being subjected to. His writings and speeches frequently urge people to inform themselves of the political circumstances and debates of the time and perhaps in a reference to his own early quest for knowledge and understanding, he implores people to "[g]o to the various literary gatherings and associations and discuss with the people there and exchange views about politics".<sup>65</sup> al-Nadim also wrote plays, poetry, short stories and, while involved in his Islamic charitable schools project, actively promoted the teaching of these skills as well as drama, art and oratory in order to communicate, to as wide an audience as possible, issues of national politics and concerns.

Language, and specifically native Egyptian Arabic, was clearly an important core feature of the Egyptian nation for al-Nadim. His use of Egyptian colloquial Arabic in

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Nadim's literary output was remarkably varied and while his main output was through his journalism, he also gave numerous speeches, especially during the years 1879–1882. In addition, he wrote a number of plays, poetry and short stories, a few of which can be seen in the limited amount of al-Nadim's extant publications. These include Abd al-Fattah al-Nadim (ed.) op.cit. *Sulafat al-Nadim*; 'Abd al-'Azeem Ramadan and Abd al-Noni'm Ibrahim al-Gami'i (eds) *Kaana wa yakun (Was and to Be)*, Cairo, Taba'Matba'at Dar al-Kutb, 1995; *al-Masamir (The Nails)*, no reference details.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Nadim, op. cit. *The Dibaa and the Arabs*, Issue No. 19, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1881, p.307.

his speeches, articles, plays and stories was meant to serve three important purposes. First, by using a specifically Egyptian, al-Nadim sought to underline the 'innate' link of the Egyptian people to a distinct and particular language. Egypt's particular historical evolution, with its links and encounters with Arabs, Mamluks and Turks, served to form a particular language and historical tradition, which was, according to al-Nadim, a national history.<sup>66</sup> Second, by doing this, he was able to put forward the idea that, through a distinct 'national' language, a set of national customs, traditions and indeed a national consciousness could both be articulated and reinforced by members of the nation. So, ensuring the continuation of the language would, as a necessary by-product, lead to the strengthening of national consciousness and the affirmation of Egypt's national identity. Lastly, the use of Egyptian colloquial Arabic had for, al-Nadim, a number of practical purposes. By using colloquial Arabic, he was in touch with the language of everyday usage, which enabled him to target and appeal to those social groups where literacy rates were lowest. The writing style al-Nadim employed, as well as the language he used to convey his ideas about national regeneration, lent itself to being read as stories and entertainment in public places frequented by people unlikely to be literate. Standard Arabic – the modern relative of classical Arabic – was used in elite circles and the Egyptian elites hardly ever received praise in al-Nadim's writings and speeches. The government elites they were consistently portrayed by him as the major cause of Egypt's problems. He also criticised the 'ulama for using standard Arabic in their sermons and classes to analyse abstract theological principles that people neither understood nor took a great deal of interest in.<sup>67</sup> Using Egyptian colloquial Arabic allowed al-Nadim to show his rejection of these social groups and provide an alternative path to national liberation.

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<sup>66</sup> The other 'ulama reviewed in Chapters 4 and 5 (al-Tahtawi, al-Marsafi and 'Abduh) all, to a greater or lesser extent, recognised Egypt's Pharaonic tradition as a source of Egypt's distinct and 'glorious' history. Al-Nadim, however, rarely mentions Egypt's Pharaonic past. See the comments by Wendell: "The 'Pharaonic' attachment is conspicuous by its absence: al-Nadim's Golden Age is wholly orthodox on the surface, since it is the period of the early Arab empire and caliphate", Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p.146.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Hadidi, op. cit. *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, p.111.

## Nationalism With or Without Islam?

Although al-Nadim was never part of the formal 'ulama corps, he had considerable religious training. By the age of nine, he had memorised the entire Quran and later went on to study at the Sheikh Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Alexandria. Coming to Cairo in 1861, he also studied at al-Azhar and attended classes held by some of the most prominent 'ulama of the day in Islamic theology and Arabic studies.<sup>68</sup> Even though his religious training may not have been as formal and structured as the other 'ulama reviewed in Chapter 4, his credentials as an 'alim of high knowledge and considerable authority never seemed to be in doubt.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, his writings and speeches addressing Egypt's decline and the necessity of recovering the country from European domination and occupation remain firmly grounded in his insistence that Islam represents, along with the Arabic language, a fundamental core feature of the Egyptian nation, which must be re-asserted if Egypt's decline is to be halted.

Although al-Nadim's emphasis on Islam as a core element of the Egyptian nation is evident, at the same time it must be seen within the context of Egypt's relationship to the Ottoman Empire and as part of the wider Muslim 'umma. While al-Nadim's writings clearly illustrate a strong sense of an Egyptian national identity and distinctiveness, his emphasis on Egypt's Islamic identity is placed alongside Egypt's position within the Islamic 'umma and he consistently places Egypt's Islamic identity under the authority of the Ottoman Sultan. In this respect, he powerfully articulates a distinction between Egypt's desire and indeed her right to claim national political independence from the Ottoman Empire, with her obligations towards and aspiration to remain firmly under the Islamic authority of the Ottoman Sultan and, by extension, within the largely symbolic community of the 'umma (see Chapter 6). This changes dramatically when the Ottoman Sultan finally decides, under pressure from Britain and

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<sup>68</sup> See al-Nadim's diaries in Muhammad Ahmed Khalaf Allah (ed.) op. cit. *'Abdallah al-Nadim*: see Chapter 1 (His Early Life) and also biographical details in 'Ali al-Hadidi, op. cit. *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, pp.14–18: see Chapter 1 (*'Ibn al-Khabaz'* (The Baker's Son)).

<sup>69</sup> Al-Nadim often lectured at Islamic schools around the country most notably at al-Azhar during the years 1879-1882 and, his speeches and writings consistently invoked religious narratives and arguments and demonstrate his considerable knowledge in this area. See, al-Hadidi, *Khatib al-Wataniyya*, pp.78–85 and Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p.146.



to a lesser degree France, to publicly denounce 'Urabi and the nationalist movement and to allow British troops to land in Egypt, crush and overthrow the nationalist government and return Khedive Tawfiq and his government to power. These events are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

For al-Nadim, there seemed no contradiction between affirming Egypt's Islamic identity while at the same time asserting Egypt's right to national self-government: it is here that al-Nadim makes a fundamental contribution to the debate on Islam's relationship to nationalism. According to him, Egypt's history was a history of many different peoples (*jins*)<sup>70</sup> coming together and settling within Egypt over long periods of time. Special mention is given to Egypt's Turkish, Arabic and Circassian immigrants who, al-Nadim insists, "are all people of this country".<sup>71</sup> Rhetorically, al-Nadim argues that if they were told to return to their countries of origin, they would find that they no longer knew where they came from and that their national identity was now wholly Egyptian. This aspect of the nationalist movement was overshadowed by the way that many foreign journalists, diplomats and foreign governments focused on 'Urabi's initial demands for greater rights for native Egyptian army officers; they ignored the way the nationalist movement came to broaden its demands and therefore its constituency. As a result, fear was widespread that the nationalist movement was merely asserting the rights of native Egyptians, which led al-Nadim to stress and make clear the inclusiveness of Egypt's nationalist movement.<sup>72</sup>

The inclusiveness of the nationalist movement – which al-Nadim was largely responsible for articulating, was to have significant implications for the way the movement dealt not only with Egypt's various ethnic groups but also the assertion of

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<sup>70</sup> The term *jins* and its derivative *jinsiyya* has a number of overlapping but also contradictory meanings and it is important to highlight the context of its various uses. So, while *jins* can be used in the sense of race, species or *Volk*, its derivative, *jinsiyya*, as Wendell points out, can be translated as "racial extraction", "racial group" or "nationality" (Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p.149). However, Wendell fails to mention another use of the term *jinsiyya*, which I believe al-Nadim also employed: to refer to a person's citizenship. So, a person's passport or identity card will categorise their *jinsiyya*, citizenship, without regard to their ethnic or racial background.

<sup>71</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, op. cit. *The Diba and the Arabs*, p.313.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp.307–15.

Egypt's Islamic identity and how this identity was reconciled with its national identity. So, for instance, in relation to the Arabs, Turks and Circassians mentioned previously, al-Nadim argues that "the tie of religion united us firstly and then the tie of *watan* provided us with the tie of love and unity".<sup>73</sup> The implication here is that, it was due to the imperative of the spread of Islam and the expansion of its political influence that people of various ethnic origins encountered each other and were brought together in this process. With the passage of time, people lived together, intermarried, settled and exchanged and took on new cultural practices, or abandoned old ones, all of which crystallised into the 'modern' Egyptian nation, which, for al-Nadim, "takes away all discrimination according to (previous) national affiliations".<sup>74</sup> Hence, al-Nadim is at pains to show that the nationalist movement, having brought down the government of Ryad Pasha after the 'Abdin incident in September 1881 (see Chapter 6), had no hesitation in forming a government with Sharif Pasha – a Circassian – as its Prime Minister. For al-Nadim, the overthrow of the Ryad Pasha government was not for reasons of ethnic exclusion but because it failed to recognise and attribute equal rights to all its citizens, instead favouring the Turco-Circassian community and allowing unacceptable levels of European domination of Egypt's domestic affairs. Thus he puts forward the idea that the nationalist movement aims to "protect and defend our country from any threat ... and that Egypt is one community regardless of whether the government is Arab, Turkish or Circassian".<sup>75</sup>

It also evident that al-Nadim sees the tie of a common religion and the tie of *watan* not as incompatible but rather as organically linked and convergent. The common bond of Islam among the people of Egypt evolves seamlessly into the bond of nationality and, while the Islamic bond is one of worshipping the same God, adhering to the same scriptures and Prophets and participating in the same religious practices, the tie of *watan* imbues members of the community with a set of rights, duties and national aims. In this way, al-Nadim sees Islam as providing a particular and, for him, a fundamental

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.313.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

common bond that has the strength of providing the nation with common cultural understandings, a common history and in view of Egypt's multi-ethnic nature, a common heritage. So, it is in the realm of common cultural understandings that the Arabic language, as discussed above, contributes significantly to the *watan*'s particular identity, as do social traditions and customs which are woven into the social fabric of the nation. In addition, in terms of a common history and heritage, Islam provides the over-arching historical bond for members of a nation which possesses a variety of ethnic histories and heritages. So, in one of the last issues of *al-Tankit wa 'i-Tabkit*, al-Nadim addresses a lengthy article to patriotic Egyptians and insists that "our love for our country and our religion unites us and prevents us from abandoning it".<sup>76</sup> Similarly, he promises to continue his patriotic advice and implores the nation to "follow the rule of obeying Allah, the Prophet and our rulers ... and whoever follows the disbelievers instead of following the believers has indeed strayed from Allah's path".<sup>77</sup>

Not only are there contradictions in al-Nadim's insistence on the central role of the 'ulama in arresting the decline of the nation but his insistence that Islam represents the underlying common feature upon which the bond of *wataniyya* is built does not account for the role of the significant Coptic Christian community in Egypt at the time. Indeed, al-Nadim's assurances that the nationalist movement recognises Egypt's multi-ethnic foundations and, rather than represent a purely 'native' Egyptian constituency, in fact seeks to incorporate and secure equal rights for all ethnic groups, appears on closer examination to ignore the question of religious diversity in Egypt. Although Coptic Christians, Egyptian Jews and Armenian Christians accounted for only a small percentage of the population, these ethno-religious communities had existed in Egypt for considerable lengths of time, the Copts being descendants of the ancient Egyptians and converting to Christianity in the early years after the death of the Prophet Jesus. All these communities played a significant part in the social, political and economic life of the country and, in fact, al-Nadim's national declaration

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<sup>76</sup> 'Abdallah al-Nadim, *Dear Patriots (Iyoha al-Wataniyoun)*, *al-Tankit wa al-Tabkit*, Issue No. 18, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1881, p.299.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.301.

on behalf of the National Party (al-Hizb al-Watani), widely published on 1 January 1882, recognises the importance of Egypt's ethno-religious diversity. Clause 5 emphatically asserts that:

*The National Party is a political, not a religious, party. It is composed of men of differing creeds and beliefs. All the Christians and Jews, and all who plough the soil of Egypt, and speak their language, are affiliated with the party. It has no interest in religious differences, and acknowledges that all are brethren, whose rights, in political life and before the religious laws are equal. This is accepted without question by the highest religious authorities (Sheikhs) of al-Azhar, who support this party and believe that Muhammad's true law [al-Shari'a al-Muhammadiyya al-haqqa] forbids hatred and considers that all men should be treated equally.*<sup>78</sup>

But as shown in the earlier section of this chapter on al-Nadim's contribution to defining the Egyptian nation, the high ideals of Clause 5 in the National Party declaration were frequently ignored by al-Nadim in many of his articles and speeches; indeed, his default position of portraying Islam as the most powerful defining feature of the nation was what he returned to more often than not. In fact, with the British invasion of Egypt in the second half of 1882, and the escalation of hostilities between British forces and the Egyptian national resistance, al-Nadim's, and the rest of the nationalist movement's political rhetoric became even more imbued with specifically Islamic calls to jihad, heroism and the taking up of arms to protect Egypt's status as a nation of Islam.

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<sup>78</sup> Khalaf Allah (ed.) op. cit. 'Abdallah al-Nadim, p.143. This clause also appears in Wendell, op. cit. *Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p.158 (my brackets above. I have used my own translation which differs from Wendell's only slightly).

## **Chapter 6**

### **Between ‘Umma, Empire and Nation: The Coalition of**

### **‘Urabi and the ‘Ulama**

If the years 1879 and 1880 can be characterised as the years where ‘Urabi emerged as leader of the nationalist movement in Egypt, the years 1881 and 1882 can generally be seen as the ‘revolutionary years’ when his nationalist movement came to make more vocal demands for independence and which culminated in violent demonstrations and an anti-occupation war against the British in the second half of 1882. While the ‘ulama’s involvement in the emergent nationalism of 1879 and 1880 was important, it remained confined to the intellectual and religious sphere. A further reason why their support remained somewhat muted during those years was division and indecision within their ranks as between supporting the Khedive, the Ottoman Sultan or the various other local nationalist forces competing with each other at the time.

However, in the years 1881–1882, many Egyptian ‘ulama questioned their links to the Ottoman Empire, re-assessed their loyalty to the Caliph of Islam and rejected their subservience to the Khedive by supporting a local nationalist movement that had mass popular appeal and quickly emerged as the dominant political force within Egypt. Having discussed the main intellectual currents behind the modernist or reformist movement and the intellectual foundations of nationalism in the works of Abdallah Al-Nadim and Muhammad ‘Abduh, this chapter will focus on some of the practical concerns the ‘ulama displayed in supporting ‘Urabi and the nationalist movement. In particular, this chapter examines some of the factors behind the ‘ulama’s shift away from the universalism of the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim ‘umma and local embodiment of this institution in the Khedive towards a native nationalist movement.

During the period 1879–1882, ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement itself underwent considerable change and transformation. From a relatively narrow protest movement aimed at promoting the status of native Egyptian army officers, it evolved into a broad movement for national sovereignty and independence. These political expressions had to be reconciled with Egypt’s place within the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic ‘umma, which, ‘Urabi recognised, could not be discarded outright for fear of alienating his

popular support among Egyptian Muslims, who still regarded the Ottoman Sultan as the head of the Islamic 'umma. At the same time, 'Urabi also had to acknowledge that local Khedival rule (first Isma'il and then Tawfiq) was in fact the local embodiment of Ottoman rule and of the Sultan's authority in Egypt.

Egyptian national independence and the limiting of Khedival authority would not only have political consequences but also significant consequences for Egypt's relationship to the Ottoman Empire in terms of its Islamic attachments to the 'umma. In seeking to pursue the desire for national independence while at the same time retaining Egypt's Islamic character and position within the 'umma, 'Urabi came to see the 'ulama of Egypt, with their widely held moral and religious authority, as a key constituency. Considering the 'ulama's importance as potential legitimators of his movement, the 'Urabists co-opted important sections of the 'ulama into supporting their particular conception of Egypt by emphasising an Islamic dimension to their nationalism upon which they were able to appeal directly to the 'ulama for their support?

However, the 'ulama of Egypt were not a homogenous group with broadly similar attitudes to political change. In fact, their reaction to the rise of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement was varied, complex and heterogeneous, based on a number of factors that are important to examine. Many 'ulama, it is true, did support 'Urabi and the nationalists but many rejected his movement and the emergent nationalism 'Urabi came to represent. This chapter considers the positions of both pro-nationalist 'ulama and those of the anti-nationalist camp in order to better understand where the 'ulama situated Islam in the political events occurring at the time. For the 'ulama, supporting 'Urabi and the nationalists may have meant the rejection of an oppressive monarchical system with growing European attachments that were not easily reconcilable with Islam. But it also meant questioning Egypt's relations with the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan and the Islamic 'umma, which had already, over the course of the nineteenth century, become increasingly distanced. Within the context of these concerns about political community and loyalty, the 'ulama held and disseminated various views and opinions and examining these debates is important in assessing their complex and heterogeneous views on nationalism and the 'Urabi movement.

## 'Umma or Empire? Egypt's Islamic Attachments

The nineteenth century saw Egyptian Islam in many respects gradually shift away from the influence of Ottoman Islamic institutions. In terms of the Shari'a, "since the time of the Ottoman conquest in 1517, there had been a tradition of importing the leading judges from Istanbul".<sup>1</sup> However, the emergence of Muhammad Ali and his desire for judicial independence from Istanbul changed this, "mark[ing] the end of Turkish influence on the Egyptian courts with most judges now being Azhar graduates".<sup>2</sup> It must be pointed out that, although Egypt began providing its own court judges, the official legal *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence) of the Ottoman Empire, the Hanafi, continued to be applied in the Egyptian Shari'a courts even though the population of Egypt was mainly Shafi'i and Maliki. However, while the courts dispensed rulings based on the Hanafi *madhhab*, an adherent of the Shafi'i *madhhab* always occupied the powerful office of the Sheikh al-Azhar until that tradition was broken with during the reign of Khedive Isma'il.<sup>3</sup> This will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the crucial area of pedagogy, Egyptian 'ulama already enjoyed great autonomy from Istanbul. As noted above, with most Egyptian court judges coming from the various seminaries around Turkey, graduates from al-Azhar often found employment as teachers "at al-Azhar itself or at *madaaris* in Egypt or abroad".<sup>4</sup> In this way al-Azhar became a major provider of teachers, who were sent to various parts of the Empire. Similarly, al-Azhar was almost entirely responsible for the appointment of religious posts like Imams, Khatibs and Muezzins in local mosques throughout Egypt<sup>5</sup> and in

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<sup>1</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *al-Thawra al-'Urabi w'al-Ihtilaal al-Ingilizi (The 'Urabi Revolt and British Occupation)*, Cairo, al-Nahda Publishing House, 1937, p.164.

<sup>4</sup> Skovgaard-Petersen, op. cit. *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p.41.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh, *Mashru'a Tartib al-Masajid (Plans to Rearrange Mosques)* in Muhammad 'Amarah (ed.) *Al-A'mal al-Kamila al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (The Collected Works of the Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh)*, Cairo, Dar al-Sharouk, 1993, Vol. II, pp.297–305. These plans were drawn up by 'Abduh when he was Egypt's Grand Mufti and submitted to the Supreme Council for Religious Endowments in 1904. Although this occurred after the 'Urabi Revolt, they show the degree of provision necessary for the running and maintenance of mosques in Egypt.

many cases were asked by other parts of the Empire to supply these religious functionaries.

Ottoman cultural influence on Egypt also declined considerably, especially after Arabic replaced Turkish as the state language in 1863.<sup>6</sup> Still, as Ibrahim Abu Lughod has rightly pointed out, the impact of this change was only felt gradually over many years as many Egyptian ministries were run by the Turco-Circassian elite, who were not comfortable or familiar with Arabic and who continued to run their ministries in Turkish or employed numerous translators.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, many 'ulama appear to have supported a more independent stance towards the Ottoman Empire. In April 1879, a National Party Manifesto (*al-la'ihah al-wataniyya*) was submitted to representatives of the European and Ottoman powers, which reveals that out of the 329 signatories, 60 were 'ulama from Cairo, Alexandria and Damietta. Senior 'ulama such as Sheikh 'Abd al-Baqi al-Bakri,<sup>8</sup> Sheikh Abu al-'Ala al-Khalfawi,<sup>9</sup> and Sheikh al-'Idwi<sup>10</sup> were present when the Manifesto was adopted<sup>11</sup> and, according to Schölch, the signatures of 60 senior 'ulama meant a "protest against the influence of infidels in Egypt and the endangering of Islam as a religion and a way of life".<sup>12</sup> In fact, there may well have been more 'ulama signatures, as some were also members of the Chamber of Deputies,

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<sup>6</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, *History of Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Sadat*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980, p.127. See also Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2003, in particular the chapter on Egyptian nationalism.

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 'The Transformation of the Egyptian Elite: Prelude to the 'Urabi Revolt', *Middle East Journal*, No. 21, 1967, pp.325–44.

<sup>8</sup> "Abd al-Baqi al-Bakri, who was Naqib al-Ashraf, Shaykh al-Sajjada al-Bakriyya and supreme head of the Sufi orders in Egypt"; see Frederick de Jong, 'The Sufi Orders in Egypt During the 'Urabi Insurrection and the British Occupation (1882-1914): Some Societal Factors Generating Aloofness, Support, and Opposition', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 21, 1984, p.131.

<sup>9</sup> Meir Hatina, 'Ulama', *Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, UT, University of Utah Press, 2010. Sheikh al-Khalfawi was "a Hanafi scholar from the province of Minufiyya, ... a lecturer at al-Azhar and mufti of the Judicial Council (*Majlis al-Ahkam*) in Cairo established in 1848–9" (p.54).

<sup>10</sup> "Hasan al-Idwi al-Hamzawi who was Shaykh of a Shadhiliyya order of his own", De Jong, op. cit. *The Sufi Orders in Egypt*, p.133.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878–1882*, London, Ithaca Press, 1981, p.88.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.89.



another category of signatories to the Manifesto. Nevertheless, 'ulama signatories to this Manifesto are the joint third highest grouping and demonstrate significant 'ulama involvement and support of the nationalist movement in 1879.

But, despite the widening of political, religio-legal and even cultural distance between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan remained widespread amongst many Egyptians. Cole argues that "literate Egyptians, for the most part saw themselves as loyal subjects of the [Ottoman] Sultan".<sup>13</sup> Sultan Abd al-Hamid (r.1876–1909) himself became concerned with promoting his moral authority through the idea of the Caliphate and Egypt's links to, and inclusion within, the wider Islamic 'umma. Again, Cole argues that with 'Abdulhamid insistently laying claim to the Caliphate, his moral authority may have actually increased in the late 1870s and early 1880s, especially among the 'ulama and literate classes".<sup>14</sup> In crisis both domestically and abroad, with territorial losses in the Balkans and a series of humiliating military defeats during the Russo–Turkish war, the Empire was in desperate need of allies and support. Appealing to Muslim sentiment and the Islamic 'umma was a way of generating much needed backing.

Egypt's relationship with the Ottoman Empire was thus a complex one that was by no means consistent. On the one hand, evidence suggests a strong divergence between them along political and institutional lines. Muhammad Ali and his successors all sought, with varying degrees of success, to gain greater political freedom from the Empire so as to govern Egypt with as little interference from Istanbul as possible. Similarly, institutional links to Istanbul through the judicial system and the mosques were also gradually weakened, with al-Azhar becoming increasingly prominent in providing judges for the Egyptian Shari'a courts, as well as already providing teachers and religious functionaries for its domestic Islamic needs. At the same time increased political and institutional autonomy from the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century was accompanied by moves to maintain its Islamic ties through ties to the

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<sup>13</sup> Juan R. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

'umma and the Ottoman Sultan. Clearly then, there was a distinction between Egypt's desire to remain within the 'umma, with the Ottoman Sultan as its Caliph and ultimate moral authority, and, on the other hand, its political and institutional links to the Empire.

The parallel aims of gaining greater independence from the Ottoman Empire while maintaining loyalty to the Sultan are evident in the January 1882 declaration of the National Party, which 'Urabi and other nationalist army officers had come to dominate during the late 1870s.<sup>15</sup> The declaration was published widely in Egypt and abroad as a result of the 'Abdin Palace confrontation on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1881. 'Abdin Palace, in the heart of Cairo was the official residence of Khedive Tawfiq. 'Urabi and the nationalists marched to the palace, confronted Khedive Tawfiq and issued a set of nationalist demands. These actions shocked both the European powers and Istanbul both because of the audacity of confrontation and the demands themselves, which included a call to dismiss the Government of Ryad Pasha, the incumbent Prime Minister, enhance the role and authority of Parliament and increase the size of Egypt's standing army.<sup>16</sup> Yet the demands were met, with a statement published in the official government newspaper stating that "on Saturday evening, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1881, the Government of Ryad Pasha was discharged and Sharif Pasha was asked to form a new Government".<sup>17</sup>

After this success, 'Urabi and the nationalists felt they had to make clear their intentions and explain their outlook for Egypt in order to calm the foreign powers who all had vast interests in Egypt's political future. The National Party declaration of 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.70.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.119. See also John Ninet, *Arabi Pacha*, Berne, Paris, L'auteur, 1884; Ahmed 'Urabi, *Mudhakirat al-Za'im Ahmed 'Urabi: Kashf al-Sataar 'Ain Sur al-Asraar fi al-Nahda al-Misriyya al-Mashhoora bil-Thawra al-'Urabiyya* (*The Diaries of the Leader Ahmed 'Urabi: Unveiling the Secret of All Secrets on the Egyptian Renaissance Known as the 'Urabi Revolution*) (Studied and edited by Dr 'Abd al-Mon'im Ibrahim al-Jemi'i), Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, 2005, Vol. 1, pp.403-05.

<sup>17</sup> *Wakai'i al-Masrya* (*Egyptian Events*), 11<sup>th</sup> September 1881. Sharif Pasha was a Turco-Circassian nationalist who came to prominence during the rule of Khedive Ismail and was, during the years 1879-1882, mainly aligned with the constitutionalists looking to limit Khedival power and increase the power of the Parliament.

January 1882 was published in *The Times* of London,<sup>18</sup> as well as local and regional newspapers. Interestingly, the first clause in the declaration addresses Egypt's relationship with the Sublime Porte and opens by declaring:

*the National Party believes that relations between Egypt and the Sublime Porte should be well maintained, consulting with it where necessary. Moreover, the [National] Party believes the Sultan Abd al-Hamid is their master and Caliph of God on earth and the leader of the Muslims.*<sup>19</sup>

By addressing the Porte in the first clause of the declaration, 'Urabi and the nationalists show clearly that they considered Egypt's relationship with the Porte to be of primary importance. Despite the declining strength of the Ottoman Empire, by now widely acknowledged, the nationalists, by recognising Egypt's relationship with the Porte first, underlined Egypt's loyalty and historical links to the Empire. But interestingly, while doing this, the declaration also attempts to set new parameters to the relationship, asserting the aspiration of Egyptian independence and the promotion of Egyptian national interests. The uncompromising pursuit of the goals of Egyptian national independence was thus tempered somewhat and qualified within the context of giving importance to Egypt's loyalty to the Porte, based on the institutions of the Caliphate and 'umma.

This is far from manifesting a subservient relationship. On the contrary, the declaration asserts the National Party's determination to "protect the national interests as much as possible" and its willingness to "resist whoever would try and make Egypt an Ottoman State (meaning whoever deprives Egypt of the advantages of its administrative independence)".<sup>20</sup> The statement therefore draws a clear distinction

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<sup>18</sup> Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1907, p.556. The declaration was also sent from Blunt to Prime Minister William Gladstone on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1881 and appears in full, with Gladstone's response, in Blunt's book.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Ahmed Khalaf Allah (ed.) *'Abdallah Al-Nadim wa Mudhakiraatal-Siyasiyya* ('Abdallah al-Nadim and his Political Memoirs), Cairo, Al-Maktaba al-Anglu al-Misriyya, 1956, Chapter 7, npn. This declaration appears in a number of sources; see also al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.145. However, I have chosen to use the statement that appears in the diaries of Abdullah al-Nadim as I deem this to be more accurate. Al-Nadim's literary and oratory skills, and his support of the Revolution, meant that he was not only very close to 'Urabi but also at the centre of the National Party: it is likely that he had a significant hand in preparing the National Party declaration.

<sup>20</sup> Khalaf Allah, op. cit. *'Abdallah Al-Nadim wa Mudhakiraatal-Siyasiyya*, Chapter 7.

between, on the one hand, the Nationalists' desire for national independence, Egypt's right to self-government and, on the other, their acknowledgement of Egypt's loyalty to the Sultan as part of the community of Muslims and the Sultan's position at the head of this religious community. However, while distinguishing the two conceptions of community, the document also attributes considerable importance to each. In the same breath the Declaration accepts the national *and* the Islamic foundations of the Egyptian nation and places them together at the core of Egyptian nationalism.

Attaching a strong religious dimension to national aspirations may well have been a key factor in attracting members of the 'ulama to support the aims of the nationalists. In July 1882, 'ulama were once again prominent signatories to the Second National Congress Manifesto deposing Khedive Tawfiq on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1882. In an analysis of the 393 signatories of this crucial Manifesto, Cole splits the signatories into five groups; ruling elite, intelligentsia, urban groups, rural groups and unknown. The intelligentsia, he tells us, is the largest among these groups with 160 signatories. More important, Cole's analysis reveals that the 'clergy'<sup>21</sup> represent over half the signatories in this category with 86 'clergy' signing the Manifesto, making them the largest single group of signatories. According to both Schölch and Cole, 'ulama opposed and supported the nationalist movement.

While the work of Schölch and Cole in this area has been a valuable contribution in pointing towards the stance of this important social group, it merely sets the scene for further analysis of the 'ulama's position. For instance, who were these 'ulama and what influenced them in making the decision to support or reject the nationalists? In relation to the Ottoman Empire and Egypt's Islamic ties to the 'umma, what factors did 'ulama consider important in this relationship and what were the considerations of those 'ulama who sided with the nationalists? Finally, to support the deposition of the Khedive was to also question the Ottoman Sultan's authority in Egypt: on what basis

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<sup>21</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.124. Here Cole refers mainly to Muslim 'ulama but his figures also include the Patriarch of Egypt and the Chief Rabbi of Egypt.

did anti-Khedival 'ulama see this as a legitimate position consistent with Islamic principles of community, loyalty and power?

Interestingly, as the 'ulama became increasingly prominent in the National Party, the number of army officers signing key manifestos declined, with only 15 army officers signing the July 1882 Manifesto, as opposed to 93 senior military officials signing the April 1879 Manifesto.<sup>22</sup> This reconfiguration of the prominent groups within the nationalist movement is a result of the widening of its particularistic aims in the early years of 1879–1880 to a broader focus on Egyptian national sovereignty and independence. Nevertheless, 'Urabi and the nationalists were clearly aware of the importance of Egypt's relationship with the Ottoman Sultan and seem equally aware of the importance of the Sultan's endorsement of their movement – which in the end was never received. However, in order to attract the Sultan's support, 'Urabi and the nationalists portray the struggle as one that not only seeks to solve the problems being encountered in Egypt but that also attempts to re-impose the Sultan's authority in Egypt in the face of European encroachment and, indeed, to re-assert Egypt's position at the heart of the Islamic 'umma. The problem for 'Urabi and the nationalists was that, while many 'ulama supported this view, many also believed that nationalism would harm Islamic unity because it would lead to a greater presence of the European powers in Egypt and hence a greater distance between Egypt and the Ottoman Sultan and, vitally, Egypt's place within the Islamic 'umma.

### **'Urabi, 'Ulama and the Ottoman Empire**

The 'Abdin Palace confrontation between 'Urabi and Khedive Tawfiq changed the political map in Egypt, where 'Urabi emerged as the leading political force. His dominance sprang from the fact that his demands to Khedive Tawfiq gave expression to many of the nationalist forces, including Sharif Pasha's constitutionalists, Egyptian nobles, senior military officers and merchants and notables, who all, as a result, coalesced around 'Urabi and his popular movement immediately after the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.246. See also Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!* and al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*.

confrontation.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the confrontation alerted the Ottoman Sultan to the possibility of losing power in Egypt to the nationalists and, equally, the possibility of Britain increasing its influence in Egypt through an alliance with either Khedive Tawfiq or 'Urabi and the nationalists. This led to a dramatic increase in the political intrigue instigated by all parties. Without examining this in detail here, it is sufficient to say that the evidence<sup>24</sup> suggests the Ottoman Sultan did indeed send contradictory messages to 'Urabi and the Khedive offering support to both of them and that this may have been a significant factor in shifting 'ulama loyalties away from the Ottoman Sultan in favour of 'Urabi and the nationalists.

Despatching a first official delegation to Egypt in October 1881 soon after the 'Abdin confrontation, the Sultan tasked the mission, headed jointly by 'Ali Nizami, a decorated Ottoman General, and 'Ali Fu'ad, the Sultan's private secretary, with gaining "as much advantage as possible for the Sultan from the conflict between the Khedive and the Egyptian officers" and to "strengthen the ties between Egypt and the Porte".<sup>25</sup> As well as meeting the Khedive, the delegation also met with senior army officers close to 'Urabi, although seemingly not 'Urabi himself. Then, after meeting the key players in the 'Abdin confrontation, the Ottoman delegation also engaged with senior 'ulama in order to gauge their opinions of the confrontation and to determine the extent of the 'ulama's loyalty to the Sultan after the events of 'Abdin.

Of considerable concern to the delegation was the fear that the 'Abdin incident was in some way connected to, or a prelude to, an emergence of Arab nationalism coupled with strong anti-Turkish feeling that by extension rejected the Caliphal claims of Sultan Abd al-Hamid. An Arab nationalist and other anti-Ottoman protest movements had already emerged, around 1880 onwards, in Syria, Lebanon, Sudan and Baghdad, calling for a revolt against the Turks and the re-imposition of Arabs at the head of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>24</sup> Ahmed Shafique, *Mudhakkirati fi Nisf Qarn (My Memoirs Over Half a Century)*, Cairo, n.p., 1934–36, Vol. 2, pp.149–152.

<sup>25</sup> Schölch op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.173. See also Shafique, op. cit. *Mudhakiraati*, p.123 and also al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.166.

Islamic 'umma.<sup>26</sup> The Ottoman Sultan feared that either the Khedive or the 'Urabists were inspired by these ideas and would give Arab nationalism its Egyptian expression. However, when this was put to the 'ulama, they rejected it outright and proclaimed their unreserved loyalty to the Sultan. The senior 'ulama present at the meeting were Sheikh al-Azhar Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi (1827–1897), Sheikh 'Abd al-Baqi al-Bakri and Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish (Mufti of the Maliki *madhhab*, 1802–1882).<sup>27</sup> During the meeting, these senior 'ulama underlined Egypt's loyalty to the Sultan and its central place within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>28</sup>

The three 'ulama mentioned above reflect well some of the complex and overlapping concerns and opinions of the 'ulama of the time in relation to modernisation and the emergence of nationalism. Sheikh al-'Abbasi (who will be discussed later in this chapter) was in fact one of 'Urabi's main critics at the time and, recognising this, 'Urabi, with the support of other, pro-nationalist, 'ulama made numerous attempts to undermine his authority, weaken his position and break the relatively close relationship Sheikh al-'Abbasi enjoyed with the ruling Khedives.<sup>29</sup>

Sheikh 'Illaish, on the other hand, was a staunch supporter of 'Urabi and the nationalists – despite his ultra-conservative stance, fiercely defending the practice of *taqlid*-based learning and strict adherence to recognised and authoritative texts and

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<sup>26</sup> Ahmed 'Urabi, *Mudhakiraat (Diaries/Memoirs)*, (edited and commentary by Abd al-Mun'im Ibrahim al-Jami'i), Cairo, Dar al-Kutb, 2005, Section 11, Chapter 1, p.401. See also Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.173. On Arab nationalism, see Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1962 and also Choueiri, op. cit. *Arab Nationalism*.

<sup>27</sup> For details on Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish see Scholch, op cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.31; see also 'Ali Mubarak Pasha, *al-Khittat al-Tawfiqiyya al-Jadida li Misr al-Qahira wa muduniha wa biladiha al-qadima al-shahira (Tawfiq's New Plans for Egypt, Cairo and its Cities and their Old and Famous Districts)*, Cairo, Bulaq, 1886–89, vol. 4, pp. 41–44

<sup>28</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.176. See also al-Rafi'i op. cit. *al-'Urabi*, p.166 and also Shafique, op. cit. *Mudhakiraati*, p.123. While Schölch gives the names of the 'ulama attending the meeting with the Ottoman delegates, he does not state the source of this information. The other two sources omit informing us of the names of the 'ulama but confirm that the meeting took place between the Ottoman delegation and senior 'ulama. For their positions within the Sufi orders, see de Jong, op. cit. 'The Sufi Orders in Egypt', p.131.

<sup>29</sup> 'Ali Mubarak Pasha op. cit. *al-Khittat al-Tawfiqiyya*, Vol. 17, pp.12–13.

educational curricula at al-Azhar.<sup>30</sup> In the legal sphere, he was an equally staunch adherent of the Maliki *madhhab* of legal interpretation; his fatawa<sup>31</sup> demonstrate not only his adherence to the Maliki *madhhab* but also his conservatism in the interpretation of legal matters. For 'Illaish, "reform meant the purification of people's understanding of religion from the corruptions of ignorant delusions and wishful thinking",<sup>32</sup> which proper interpretation of the law was meant to prevent. Given the 'ulama's possession of 'ilm and training in the Islamic sciences, they had a fundamental responsibility in interpreting law in line with the recognised legal schools and the teachings of their founding Imams; deviation from this would, for 'Illaish, lead to a "public lack of respect for Islam ... and social decay".<sup>33</sup> His conservatism is displayed here in a fatwa he issued on obtaining a foreign education in a non-Muslim country:

*It is decreed in the Shari'a of Islam that travel to the land of the enemy for commerce is a discredit to the Testament of Faith, and improper conduct, to say nothing of settling down in it or seeking knowledge in it. And it is decreed in the Shari'a of the Muslims that the branches of knowledge that are to be sought are those having to do with Shari'a and their tools, which are subjects related to Arabic language. More than that should not be sought, but rather*

*should be avoided. It is known that the Christians learn nothing at all of the Shari'a subjects or their tools and that most of the sciences derive from weaving, weighing, and cupping, and these are among the lowest trades among the Muslims.*<sup>34</sup>

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, he had clashed with Muhammad 'Abduh when 'Abduh had studied a text outside the prescribed curriculum: Sheikh 'Illaish reprimanded him not only for this but also for criticising *taqlid*-based learning and stepping outside of what 'Abduh claimed to be its narrow intellectual parameters. In

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<sup>30</sup> Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, p.89.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Ibn-Ahmad, *'Illaish Fath al-'Ali al-Malik fi al-Fatwa 'ala Madhhab al-Imam Malik (The Divine Revelation in Legal Opinions According to the School of Imam Malik)*, 2 vols., Cairo, Musötafa al-Babi al-Höalabi, 1937.

<sup>32</sup> Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, p.96.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



matters of pedagogy and learning, the role of al-Azhar and the wider 'ulama community, the two could not have been farther apart. But, despite their opposition on particular issues and their entirely different perspectives on the fundamentals of Islam, reform, and the role of the 'ulama – 'Abduh being a staunch modernist and 'Illaish the opposite – both became senior figures supporting 'Urabi and the nationalist movement.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, Sheikh 'Illaish, the pro-nationalist, probably had more in common with the anti-nationalist Sheikh al-'Abbasi concerning the Ottoman Empire, its role in Islamic civilisation and the moral authority of the Ottoman Sultan than he did with Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh, who was an unforgiving critic of the Ottoman phase of Islamic civilisation, blaming the Ottomans for the desperate state of Islam at the end of the nineteenth century. Sheikh al-'Abbasi, on the other hand, was a Hanafi scholar which was the dominant *madhhab* in Ottoman Turkey and the legal rite of its courts and of the Sultan. The Hanafi *madhhab* in Egypt, while a throwback to the era of Ottoman–Mamluk control,<sup>36</sup> nevertheless continued to be important, being the basis of Shari'a court rulings, and served a significant role for Khedives in underlining their loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan and his authority. On the basis of his Hanafi *madhhab*, al-'Abbasi would have been favoured by the Ottoman religious authorities and indeed by the Sultan as upholding the Empire's dominant *madhhab* in one of its territories. 'Illaish also enjoyed good relations with the Ottoman authorities through his senior rank and was in regular contact with Istanbul during the crisis. In a letter to the Ottoman authorities during the crisis, he complains:

*Since we could be deprived of Sublime Porte citizenship because of foreign intervention stemming from Khedive Tawfiq's incapacity and his violation of our law and order, the leaders of all the Egyptian people and myself have demanded the dismissal of the Khedive. If the sultan permits Prince Halim to replace Khedive Tawfiq, this will bring happiness to the Egyptian people forever. In*

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Winter, 'Ulama Between the State and the Society in Pre-Modern Sunni Islam' in Meir Hatina (ed.) *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama in the Middle East*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p.34.

*such a case, permanent security can be implemented and we can remain safely under the sultan's patronage.*<sup>37</sup>

But, by July 1882, with the Khedive under the protection of the British in Alexandria, prominent 'ulama, including Sheikh 'Illaish and Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh were the leading figures in the Assembly of the Second National Congress that ordered the deposition of Khedive Tawfiq. The deposition was legitimised by the 393 delegates present at the Assembly meeting and was based on a fatwa issued by Sheikh 'Illaish, Sheikh al-'Idwi and Sheikh Abu al-'Ala al-Khalfawi. With such a serious matter, it would have been proper to have had the Grand Mufti's signature on the fatwa as well. However, Al-'Abbasi refused to sign either the Assembly order or the fatwa. Both Sheikh 'Illaish and Sheikh al-'Abbasi were pro-Ottoman in their views but diverged when it came to the question of authority and foreign intervention. In the letter quoted above, Illaish illustrates clearly his views on the threat of foreign intervention and the Khedive's responsibility on this issue. In contrast, al-'Abbasi's view on the deposition and the fatwa was that "only the Ottoman Sultan had the right to depose the Khedive".<sup>38</sup> Being a senior Hanafi, Sheikh al-Khalfawi's signature on the fatwa serves to give Hanafi legitimacy in the absence of al-'Abbasi's willingness to take part in it.

How were the events of the 'Abdin incident explained to the Ottoman delegation when they asked to know the reasons behind the confrontation? According to the Sultan's delegation, Khedive Tawfiq was the Sultan's representative in Egypt and ruled on his authority. In a speech to the army officers, 'Ali Nizami Pasha underlined this relationship, asserting, "whoever obeys the Khedive obeys the Sultan at the same time and whoever opposes the Khedive opposes the Sultan and the precepts of the Quran".<sup>39</sup> In response, Tulbah Ismat, Regimental Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment and close associate of 'Urabi – and later to become 'Urabi's son-in-law – responded by explaining that the reason for the confrontation was not to question the authority of the

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<sup>37</sup> Basbakanlik Arsivi, Yildiz collection, code: YEE, file 121, folder 27, 12/B/1299 [May 30, 1882], quoted in Hatina, op. cit. *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere*, p.47.

<sup>38</sup> Hatina, op. cit. *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere*, p.56. See also Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.355.

<sup>39</sup> Shafique, op. cit. *Mudhakkirati*, Vol. 2, p.123. This also appears in Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.175.

Sultan or of the Khedive but to bring to the attention of the Khedive, the failings of the incumbent Prime Minister Ryad Pasha whose Government had failed to protect the interests of the fatherland, the Sultan and the Khedive by refusing to increase the size of Egypt's standing army.<sup>40</sup>

At this point, the military officers, backed by some senior 'ulama, were portraying the confrontation as one that sought only to restore the authority of the Khedive and by extension the Ottoman Sultan. According to Tulbah Ismat, "the Imperial Egyptian Army (*al-jaish al-misri al-shahani*) had never questioned the authority and supremacy of our Lord and Imam, the Sultan of the Islamic Milla over Egypt". He continues with reference to the Khedive by stating "the army would likewise always protect the authority and sovereign privileges of his representative in Egypt, the Khedive".<sup>41</sup> The 'ulama also play down the confrontational aspect with the Khedive and highlight those aspects of the incident that they believe actually uphold and defend the authority of Khedive Tawfiq and the Ottoman Sultan. Thus, in the meeting with the Ottoman delegation in October 1881, it is clearly the case that every attempt was being made to assure the delegation of Egypt's loyalty to the Sultan and to connect Egypt's political future to that of the Empire. Although the incident at 'Abdin Palace was a clear and successful attempt at undermining the rule and authority of the Khedive, this is not how it was portrayed to the Ottoman delegation by the 'ulama.

In the nationalist view, the incident opposed growing European dominance in Egypt, which by implication meant strengthening Egypt's ties with the Ottoman Sultan. Second, the demands included increasing the powers of Parliament in order to scrutinise more closely the extent of Egypt's debt payments to the European powers. This measure would mean paying the debt more quickly and ending a humiliating period of subservience to the European powers, which both Egypt and the Ottoman Sultan had had to endure. Third, by demanding the overthrow of the pro-European Prime Minister Ryad Pasha and his Government, 'Urabi and the nationalists were seeking to install a more pro-Ottoman Government with the prominent Turco-

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<sup>40</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.175.

<sup>41</sup> Salim al-Naqqash, *Misr li al-Misriyin (Egypt for the Egyptians)*, Vol. 4, Alexandria, np, 1884, p.147.

Circassian Sharif Pasha at its head as Prime Minister. Finally, the demand to increase the size of Egypt's standing army was a clear indication, as far as the 'ulama were concerned, of 'Urabi's attempts to maintain Egypt's territorial integrity and her ability to defend itself from European military encroachment.<sup>42</sup> Conveying the 'Abdin incident in this way, the 'ulama's support of 'Urabi's demands could be seen as acting consistently with the aims and goals of the Ottoman Sultan and furthermore, it in no way appears to be opposed to the rule of Khedive Tawfiq.<sup>43</sup>

Satisfied with what they had seen and heard from the various groups they met, the Ottoman delegation duly reported back to the Ottoman Sultan that all relevant parties including the Khedive, the military officers and the 'ulama displayed sufficient loyalty to the Sultan and expressed genuine desires to remain within the Ottoman Empire. Finally, as was customary, medals of loyalty to the Sultan were presented to members of all the groups and the delegation then left for Istanbul on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1881.<sup>44</sup>

Although the next official delegation from the Ottoman Sultan did not come to Egypt until June 1882, there continued throughout this period (October 1881 to June 1882) constant communication, albeit secretly conducted, between the Ottoman Sultan and Khedive Tawfiq, on the one hand, and with 'Urabi, on the other. Much of the communication from Khedive Tawfiq appealed to the Ottoman Sultan to send troops to Egypt to uphold Khedival and Caliphal rule in Egypt and to overthrow the 'Urabists, who by now had overwhelming control of the Egyptian army. From 'Urabi's side, communication lines to the Sultan were channelled through a number of people close to the Ottoman Sultan, including his Private Secretary Ahmed Ratib and also the Sultan's personal spiritual advisor Sheikh Muhammad Zafar; as mentioned previously, these mainly consisted of messages of mutual support.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, pp.295–310. See also the account in Shafique, op. cit. *Mudhakiraati* and also the account in al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.169; also 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, Vol.1, p.317.

<sup>44</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.176.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Meyrick Broadley, *How We Defended Arabi ['Urabi] and his Friends: A Story of Egypt and the Egyptians*, London, Chapman & Hall, 1884; reprint: Cairo, Arab Research and Publishing Center, 1980, pp.165–70. The communication consists of numerous notes and letters. 'Urabi's main

By the time of the second official Ottoman delegation to Egypt on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1882, the political situation had changed enormously and the tone of this delegation was altogether different. The Joint Note of France and Britain addressed to the Khedive on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1882 made clear the European Powers' commitment to upholding the Khedive's authority and rule in Egypt. Its purpose, according to the British Foreign Secretary at the time, Lord Granville, was to "give assurances to Tewfiq Pasha [Khedive Tawfiq] of the sympathy and support of France and England, and to encourage His Highness to maintain and assert his proper authority".<sup>46</sup>

'Urabi was angered by the Joint Note, in which, despite continued assurances from him to the European Powers that he would secure their financial interests in Egypt, they had chosen to back the Khedive. As well as a warning shot to the nationalists, the Note was also aimed at the Porte, giving notice against any unilateral Ottoman military campaign in Egypt. From here, relations between the nationalists and the European powers, particularly Britain, began to break down. Consequently, 'Urabi's need for protection from the Ottoman Sultan against the possibility of a European military intervention in Egypt greatly increased and, to this end, he began to emphasise the Islamic basis of Egyptian nationalism and its loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan. In this period, he also turns increasingly towards the Egyptian 'ulama, eliciting their support for these claims. He writes in his diaries:

*I began spreading my ideas among the 'ulama, the elites, and mayors of the villages asking for their help in demanding security for the people which must be a priority if we are to ensure that our country is rescued from the government that shows no regard for the nation's rights. I then informed them that those who continued to remain silent about the abuse of the nation's rights were weak, cowards and would be participating in the crimes of the government. I said, we must rely on God to help us prevent injustice in our country.*<sup>47</sup>

The second Ottoman delegation was headed by Darwish Pasha, a senior Ottoman General who was accompanied by Sheikh Ahmed Asad, an 'alim from Medina and

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concern here appears to be securing the support of the Sultan by assuring him of his uncompromising loyalty and, in return, the Sultan assures 'Urabi of his support but stresses the importance of not taking any steps that would give the European powers an excuse to invade and occupy Egypt.

<sup>46</sup> Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*, p.184.

<sup>47</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, Vol. 1, p.295. See also al-Rafi'i, *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, pp.77-78.

somewhat of an expert on pan-Islamic affairs. Although the political situation had changed, the Delegation's approach was similar to that of the first Delegation, which was to deliver the same dual message assuring both the Khedive and 'Urabi of the Sultan's support. However, on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1882, senior 'ulama demanded to see Darwish Pasha and a meeting took place between the senior 'ulama and Darwish Pasha where the 'ulama expressed their support of 'Urabi and the National Party and angrily informed the Delegation that 'Urabi was defending the country from falling into the hands of infidels.<sup>48</sup> The number of 'ulama present was approximately 60 including the presence of Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish.<sup>49</sup> Court conventions would also strongly suggest that such a high level Ottoman Delegation would only have met with those 'ulama holding the most senior rank.

During this meeting, Sheikh 'Illaish declared that the 'ulama and the people of Egypt supported and backed 'Urabi and the National Party<sup>50</sup> – a clear break with the conventional format of such a meeting, which was to offer loyalty to the Sultan. The statement delivered by Sheikh 'Illaish must have been a radical departure from the traditional 'ulama assertion of Egypt's position within the Ottoman Empire and Egypt's loyalty to the Sultan. No sooner had Sheikh 'Illaish uttered this statement than he was forcibly removed from the meeting, with Darwish Pasha angrily declaring that "he had come to issue orders and not listen to preaching".<sup>51</sup> Before the meeting ended, some of the 'ulama who had not supported 'Illaish's position and had backed the Khedive were decorated by Darwish Pasha. Among them was the former Sheikh al-Azhar al-Abbasi, who had been deposed in December 1881 (more on his deposition

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<sup>48</sup> Shafique, op. cit. *Mudhakiraati*, pp.149–152.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. See also Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tarikh al-Ustadh al-Imam al-Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh* (*History of the Master and Leader Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh*), 3 vols., Cairo, Dar al-Fadilla, 2005, Vol. 1, Part 1, p.243 and personal communication from Sir Edward Malet (British Agent and Consul General) to Lord Granville in Sir Edward Malet quoted in *Egypt, 1879–1883*, London, John Murray, 1909, pp.400–01.

<sup>50</sup> Shafique, op. cit. *Mudhakiraati*, pp.149–52; see also Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*, p.307.

<sup>51</sup> Malet, op. cit. *Egypt, 1879–1883*, p.401.

below), Sheikhs Bahrawi and Abyari and the Sheikh al-Sadat, head of the powerful sufi order.<sup>52</sup>

Although 'Urabi had clearly not secured the support of all the senior Egyptian 'ulama as late as June 1882 when the meeting took place, the 'ulama's angry reaction to the Delegation of Darwish Pasha nevertheless shows a change in 'ulama allegiances. The statement of support for 'Urabi and the National Party by pro-nationalist 'ulama, indicates a movement away from the Ottoman Sultan and towards 'Urabi. This shift can be explained by the Porte's approach to the crisis in Egypt in the first half of 1882 and its lack of real support for 'Urabi and the nationalists. The Joint Note from Britain and France had underlined the European Powers' position in confirming their support of the Khedive against both the nationalists and the Porte. To counter this, 'Urabi had hoped for outright support from the Ottoman Sultan, which would have restricted the dominance of the European Powers and that of the Khedive. However, as Cole argues, "Turkey's refusal to limit European domination in Egypt and increase its influence meant that the common element of Islam that existed between Egyptians and the Ottomans never became important as Egyptians viewed Ottoman acquiescence as a sign of apostasy".<sup>53</sup>

However, there is also evidence that points towards another explanation, suggesting that 'Urabi and the pro-nationalist 'ulama may have misread the purpose of Darwish Pasha's mission and perhaps have mistimed their declaration of support for 'Urabi and the nationalists. As mentioned previously, during the first half of 1882, 'Urabi regularly communicated with the Sultan via the Sultan's personal spiritual advisor Sheikh Muhammad Zafir and his private secretary Ahmed Ratib. The letters reveal explicitly 'Urabi's proclamation of loyalty to the Sultan and his guarantees that, under him, Egypt would remain within the Ottoman Empire. More important, they also contain overt statements of the Sultan's support of 'Urabi, with the letters declaring:

*the Sultan has no confidence in Ismail, Halim or Tewfik [Tawfiq]; but the man who thinks of the future of Egypt and consolidates the ties which bind him to the*

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<sup>52</sup> Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*, p.307.

<sup>53</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution*, p.271.

*Caliphate, who pays due respect to His Majesty and gives free course to His Majesty's firmans, who assures his independent authority in Constantinople and elsewhere, who does not give bribes to a swarm of treacherous sub-officials, who does not deviate one hair's breadth from his line of duty, who is versed in the intrigues and machinations of our European enemies, who will watch against them and ever preserve his country and his faith intact – a man who does this will be pleasing, agreeable to, and accepted by our great lord, the Sultan. ... His Majesty has expressed his full confidence in you.*<sup>54</sup>

The Sultan also decorated 'Urabi with two firmans of rank, on 14<sup>th</sup> March and 24<sup>th</sup> June 1882, for his loyal service to the Sultan and Egypt's relationship to the Caliphate.<sup>55</sup> Could it be that these explicit signals of support from the Sultan gave 'Urabi and the nationalists the impression that when the opportunity arose, the Porte would surely limit European dominance and would involve itself in support of 'Urabi and the nationalists? Certainly, the messages of support would have been reassuring to 'Urabi and he may have even assured those around him that, in the end, with the Joint Note supporting the Khedive, tactically the Sultan had no option but to support 'Urabi to counter European dominance. It is from this perspective that it may have been that the pro-nationalist 'ulama demonstrated their support of 'Urabi too soon, without giving Darwish Pasha the opportunity to assess properly whether it was the right time for the Sultan to publicly declare his support for 'Urabi and the National Party. Nevertheless, the pro-nationalist 'ulama clearly came out in support of 'Urabi during their meeting with the Ottoman Delegation on 10<sup>th</sup> June, which clearly surprised and shocked the Delegation.

If the declaration by the pro-nationalist 'ulama shocked the Delegation, its aftermath provided an unmistakable impression of the strength of feeling underpinning their views. After Darwish Pasha's rejection of Sheikh 'Illaish's statement supporting 'Urabi, Darwish Pasha ordered that 'Illaish be forcibly removed from the meeting. It appears that an Ottoman guard manhandled the elderly Sheikh out of the room and, soon after, the rest of the 'ulama were unceremoniously dispersed.<sup>56</sup> When the 60 or

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Broadley, op. cit. *How We Defended Arabi*, pp.167–68. The letters contained in this book were in the contents of 'Urabi's personal papers which were given to Broadley during 'Urabi's trial.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.171.

<sup>56</sup> Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*, p.307. See also Malet, op. cit. *Egypt, 1879–1883*, p.401.



so 'ulama informed the other more junior ranked 'ulama around al-Azhar, who had not been present at the meeting, of these events, anger quickly spread amongst them and furious meetings were held throughout the night, disapproving of the behaviour and lack of respect shown by the Ottoman Delegation and specifically Darwish Pasha. By the next morning, large numbers of 'ulama had gathered around al-Azhar mosque and heated demonstrations were once more held protesting at the Ottoman Delegation. Describing these protests with an apparent reference to the demonstrations headed by the 'ulama opposing the French Occupation of Egypt nearly 100 years earlier, Berque remarks that "the Great Mosque seemed to have recovered an authority which had already been much impaired by time".<sup>57</sup>

The news of the demonstrations by the 'ulama shocked Darwish Pasha, who soon afterwards met with 'Urabi.<sup>58</sup> The meeting between the two included a series of empty promises of loyalty by 'Urabi in response to ineffectual statements of authority by Darwish Pasha, underlining the Sultan's authority over Egypt and the duty of his subjects to obey his rule. Darwish Pasha requested 'Urabi's resignation and that he relinquish control over the Egyptian army. While 'Urabi agreed to do this, his condition for compliance was that he receive a full written discharge exonerating him from all the charges and complaints that had been attributed to him and that were still outstanding. In other words, Darwish had attempted to test the resolve of 'Urabi and use Caliphal influence to get him to comply with the wishes and desires of "our master", namely to abandoned his nationalist cause and surrender his native Egyptian support to the control of the Sultan. By now, it had become clear that European, and specifically British, military involvement, which the Sultan had wanted to prevent at all costs because of the Empire's own weakness, was inevitable so long as 'Urabi and

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Berque, *Egypt, Imperialism and Revolution* (translated by Jean Stewart), London, Faber & Faber 1972, p.108.

<sup>58</sup> Strangely, the account of this meeting does not appear in 'Urabi's diaries and is minimally treated with in many of the Arabic sources, including Ahmed Shafique's memoirs, Abdallah al-Nadim's memoirs and Rashid Rida's commentary on the history and life of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh. Even Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i does not examine at any great length this key meeting, which was undoubtedly significant in isolating 'Urabi and the nationalists from the Ottoman Sultan. In contrast, many of the English commentaries of the time – Blunt, Colvin and Malet – recognise the importance of the Delegation in their treatment of the events.

the nationalists appeared capable of compromising the Khedive's authority in Egypt. 'Urabi, already aware of his control over the army, had become increasingly aware also of his popular support amongst the population of Egypt, in no small part linked to the backing he had received from the pro-nationalist 'ulama. Egypt's relations with the Ottoman Empire, its loyalty to the Sultan and its Islamic connections to Caliphal rule and the wider 'umma from this point became strained and severely compromised and were never able to recover from such a painful fracture.

If the Sultan's endorsement of the nationalist movement was important for their Islamic credentials and their ability to appeal to the Egyptian population, how significant *was* the indigenous Egyptian 'ulama in serving this purpose? Moreover, were the Egyptian 'ulama able to act independently of the Ottoman Sultan in matters relating to Egyptian politics or were the Egyptian 'ulama constrained by the idea of Islamic universalism and, within this, loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan? Finally, what were the points of tension?

### **Pro-nationalist 'Ulama and the decline in Khedival authority**

After dismantling many of the 'ulama's privileges during the nineteenth century,<sup>59</sup> the relationship between the Khedive and the 'ulama rested on three fundamental premises. The first premise was that the Khedive controlled and greatly influenced many of the key political and religious appointments, including that of the Prime Minister and government as well as the most powerful religious authority in Egypt, which was the post of the Sheikh al-Azhar. Tied to this important lever of influence was the Khedive's control of many of the financial benefits, salary increases and bonus

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<sup>59</sup> Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, 'Modernization Among the Rectors of al-Azhar 1798–1879' in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds) *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p.274; Daniel Crecelius, 'Nonideological Responses of the Egyptian 'ulama to Modernisation' in Nikki Keddie (ed.) *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500*, London, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1978; 'Ali Mubarak, op. cit. *al-Khittat al-Tawfiqiyya*.

land allocations that ministers and 'ulama received from time to time directly from the Khedive in return for loyalty and service to the Khedive.<sup>60</sup>

Second, the relationship between the Khedive and the 'ulama must be seen within the context of the idea that Khedival rule was the local extension or manifestation of Caliphal rule emanating from Constantinople and the heart of the 'umma. While the Ottoman Sultan was the ultimate Islamic ruling authority, his local representative was the Khedive, whose authority and legitimacy derived from the Sultan and Caliph of Islam himself.

Third, it is also important to see the relationship as one that was historically typical of Islamic societies in that it draws a clear distinction between the temporal and the sacred. So, for instance, the Caliph's temporal authority drew its legitimacy from control of the army and coercive forces while the 'ulama's religious authority rested on their knowledge ('ilm) of religious practice and rituals, pedagogy, and the development and application of Shari'a. For their part, widely recognised and accepted in the religious, 'sacred' sphere, the 'ulama had always rejected the opportunity to govern, most recently during the French Occupation, and by rejecting the opportunity to govern Egypt and instead elevating Muhammad 'Ali to his position. At the same time, Caliphs, throughout Islamic history, had always stayed clear of the religious domain, including teaching, preaching and the interpretation of the Quran and Sunna leaving these tasks, by and large, to the 'ulama.<sup>61</sup>

During the course of 1881 and 1882, these three key premises became compromised. Events in the Revolutionary period demonstrated Khedive Tawfiq's loss of control over the government and the army and he was seriously compromised by the Ottoman Sultan. In the eyes of the 'ulama, by losing control of the coercive elements of his

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<sup>60</sup> Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, p.52; Rudolph Peters, 'The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge: The Islamic Prohibition of Images as an Issue in the 'Urabi Revolt' in Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers (eds) *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, p.215, showing the 'ulama relations to the Khedival Council (*al-Diwan al-'Ali*). See also Edward Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London, Dent, 1908, pp.121–22.

<sup>61</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; see especially Chapter 8 (Law and Politics: Caliphs, Judges and Jurists), pp.178–94.

rule, notably the army itself, the Khedive had lost the fundamental basis of his power and ability to rule, which in turn enabled the 'ulama to shift their loyalty to the new power centre in Egypt, which was rapidly filled by 'Urabi and the nationalists. Khedive Tawfiq had always been seen as relatively weak compared to his father Khedive Ismail, whom he replaced in 1879, but he was nevertheless appointed and confirmed as Khedive by the Ottoman Sultan himself, which was sufficient endowment of authority in order to rule Egypt. However, his authority was continually questioned in the years 1879 and 1880 through parliamentary scrutiny and then rapidly disintegrated in the years 1881 and 1882.

The first major incident that raised doubts about his authority to rule occurred in February 1881. 'Urabi, and two fellow Egyptian Colonels, 'Abd al-'Al Hilmi and 'Ali Fahmy, who were later to play a major part in the nationalist movement, were suddenly dismissed by the Minister of War 'Uthman Rifki for discriminatory reasons. Rifki was a Turco-Circassian and had a history of favouring Turco-Circassians in the army over native Egyptian officers.<sup>62</sup> When 'Urabi and the Egyptian officers refused to be dismissed and countered with a petition to Prime Minister Ryad Pasha for the Minister of War to be dismissed instead, a Government and Khedive-backed plan was formulated to arrest 'Urabi, Hilmi and Fahmy. The episode is known as the Qasr al-Nile incident because, after their arrests, the Egyptian officers were taken to prison cells at Qasr al-Nile from where they escaped with the help of army officers loyal to 'Urabi. Addressing a letter explaining the incident to the French Consul M. de Ring, the Egyptian officers again requested 'Uthman Rifki be dismissed – which the Khedive finally agreed to. The incident was a very public display of the Khedive's weakness and brought 'Urabi "into immediate notoriety, and at once his name was in all men's mouths as that of a man who had been able successfully to defy the Government and bring about a change of Ministers".<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, p.225.

<sup>63</sup> Khalaf Allah, op. cit. 'Abdallah Al-Nadim, p.42. See also Blunt's account of the incident in his *Secret History* (op.cit.).

Even more damaging to the Khedive's authority was the 'Abdin Palace confrontation itself. Here, 'Urabi managed to successfully defy the Khedive's power to appoint the most high ranking officials by forcing the Khedive to dismiss his entire Government and install one selected by 'Urabi and the nationalists. Selecting a new Prime Minister, the Khedive's choice was yet again vetoed by 'Urabi: the Khedive's choice of Haidar Pasha was refused by 'Urabi because he was a relative of the Khedive's. Instead, 'Urabi was able to install his own choice of Sharif Pasha as Prime Minister.<sup>64</sup>

Both incidents also confirmed the Khedive's lack of control over the Egyptian army. As the *Amir al-Mo'minoun* or, in the Khedive's case, his representative ruler in another part of the 'umma, Khedive Tawfiq was expected to have complete control of the coercive elements of the state that could be mobilised to protect the community and its territory. Losing the ability to command the loyalty of the army meant that the ruler no longer had the ability to protect the people and territory of the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam). During the 'Abdin incident, not a single shot was fired despite the Palace grounds being full of soldiers, many of whom were there to protect the Khedive. In fact, even the soldiers there for that purpose refused to defend him when they were ordered to. The Khedive's humiliation was complete when the officers accompanying 'Urabi refused to lower their swords and place them back in their sheaths.<sup>65</sup>

As well as a lack of power in political and military circles, the Khedive also began to lose authority in the religious sphere. The incumbent Sheikh al-Azhar at the time, Sheikh Muhammad al-Abassi, had been appointed by Khedive Ismail and had held this office since 1871.<sup>66</sup> Al-'Abbasi's grandfather was a Coptic convert to Islam who came close to assuming the post of Sheikh al-Azhar before Muhammad 'Ali chose Sheikh Muhammad al-Shanawani (1812–1818)<sup>67</sup> just three years before al-'Abbasi's grandfather's death. As well as al-'Abbasi's grandfather being a prominent 'alim, his

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<sup>64</sup> 'Urabi op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, pp. 295–310. Included in these pages is the conversation that took place between 'Urabi and Khedive Tawfiq during the 'Abdin confrontation.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.301.

<sup>66</sup> 'Ali Mubarak Pasha, op. cit. *al-Khattat at-Tawfiqiyya*, Vol. 17, p.12.

<sup>67</sup> The Grand Imams of al-Azhar (Shayukhul Azhar).  
[http://www.sunnah.org/history/Scholars/mashaykh\\_azhar.htm](http://www.sunnah.org/history/Scholars/mashaykh_azhar.htm) (last accessed 23 April 2013).

father had also served as Cairo's Grand Mufti until his death in 1831. But it was al-'Abbasi the son and grandson who rose to the very height of the formal Islamic structure in Egypt with his appointment first as Grand Mufti when he was only twenty one years old in 1848 and then later as Sheikh al-Azhar in 1871 by appointment of Khedive Isma'il.<sup>68</sup> The office of Sheikh al-Azhar and its appointment had remained a Khedival prerogative since the time of Muhammad 'Ali in order to ensure control over this highly powerful position and to reduce its political importance. Being an appointee of the Khedive, the Sheikh al-Azhar came under the Khedive's influence and nearly always acted in line with and in favour of the Khedive. The appointment of al-'Abassi was significant because it was the first time in al-Azhar's history that a member of the Hanafi legal school of interpretation (*madhhab*) had been appointed Sheikh al-Azhar. At the same time, it also demonstrated the considerable extent of Khedive Isma'il's authority to appoint a Hanafi rather than a Shafi'i as Sheikh al-Azhar, imposing his choice on the 'ulama as well as the whole of Egypt. From Sunni Islam's four dominant legal schools of interpretation, the Hanafi *madhhab* was the dominant legal school within Turkey and the Ottoman Empire (as explained above). In Egypt, while the highest legal authority, that of the Grand Mufti of Egypt was normally a Hanafi and the Shari'a courts applied the Hanafi legal rite, the Sheikh al-Azhar, the highest religious authority, always came from the dominant *madhhab* in Egypt, the Shafi'i. Khedive Isma'il, in appointing the Hanafi Sheikh al-'Abassi had wanted to strengthen Egypt's links to the Ottoman Empire and, more precisely, Ottoman Islam. Rudolph Peters suggests that Sheikh al-'Abassi's appointment by Khedive Isma'il was also because the Khedive "wanted to introduce reforms and regarded al-'Abassi as the most suitable person for carrying out this task".<sup>69</sup>

As Sheikh al-Azhar, al-'Abassi was generally well respected because he was responsible for raising the profile of al-Azhar as well as securing greater financial benefits for its students and teachers. For instance, as Sheikh al-Azhar, he successfully increased the levels and amounts of government-funded student grants. He also

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<sup>68</sup> Atif Ahmed, *Islam, Modernity, Violence and Everyday Life*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.65–66. I am grateful to the author for his permission to view the text before publication.

<sup>69</sup> Rudolph Peters, op. cit. *The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge*, p.216

increased the overall provision and standard of *riwaqs* (dormitories) for its students and the daily state-funded food and bread rations for teachers and students of all ranks.<sup>70</sup> If these were positive achievements, which carried much favour amongst the students and other 'ulama, he was also responsible for attempting to break an old tradition of al-Azhar by introducing an examination system, seeking to formalise teaching practices at al-Azhar and stamp out the widespread 'unofficial' teaching and instruction taking place at the time.<sup>71</sup>

The examination (*al-'Alameyah*) was aimed at those students within al-Azhar who wished to take up teaching roles. Up until then, senior students, having studied with various 'ulama of al-Azhar over a period of time, were invited to teach in the form of leading discussion groups or classes. Depending on the success of these classes, which was judged by the trainee 'alim's ability to deal satisfactorily with questions arising during the course of the class, he would be able to hold classes by himself. As well as lacking any formal examination or the establishment of standards, the system also allowed for many to claim the title of 'alim and thus reap financial benefits from teaching and other associated jobs reserved for 'ulama. The new system introduced by al-'Abassi as Sheikh al-Azhar abolished this practice and established a strict and comprehensive examination system, which would include rigorous study of standard texts and subjects, numerous examinations and extensive refereeing of the student's academic achievements.<sup>72</sup> The new system was successfully introduced and although some resistance was put forward by Azharites, the benefits, raised standards and increased funding that al-'Abassi's was able to bring in, likely had the effect of tempering the anger of other Azharites. Up until the 'Abdin incident, al-'Abassi remained a popular Sheikh al-Azhar and appeared to have been popular amongst

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<sup>70</sup> Al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.164; Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, pp.52–53; 'Abd al-Mut'al al-Sa'idi, *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar (History of Reform in Al-Azhar)*, Cairo, Matba'at al-Itimad, 1943, pp.34–39.

<sup>71</sup> Chris A. Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1984, p.123. See also Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, pp.52–53; al-Sa'idi, op. cit. *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar*, pp.34–39.

<sup>72</sup> Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, pp.48–54.

Azharites because of his successful efforts to increase their wellbeing and conditions.<sup>73</sup> The increased financial benefits to 'ulama and students through increased salaries, food rations and improved conditions in al-Azhar and the *riwaqs* made up for years of neglect.<sup>74</sup>

Al-'Abbasi relationship with the nationalist movement is a good example of the complexity of opinion and views of the 'ulama at the time. On issues like educational reform and the need to increase standards in al-Azhar and the professionalism of the 'ulama, he can clearly be seen as a moderniser and reformer. But politically, this senior 'alim was one of 'Urabi's greatest critics and opponents, and in this respect, can be seen as a political conservative. His political views were clearly influenced by his relationship with the Khedival court although even here, he had exercised independence from Khedival influence on two previous occasions. He refused to give accommodating fatawa to both 'Abbas I, when he wanted to "confiscate all properties of the descendants of Muhammad 'Ali, and to Isma'il I when he was acting Prince-Regent for Sa'id I and wanted to assimilate the family endowments (*waqf ahli*) to public endowments (*waqf khayri*) in order to gain control over them".<sup>75</sup> On the whole, however, he was close to the rulers, having been appointed to his posts by them and hence he did not support 'Urabi's nationalist movement. During Sheikh al-Abassi's time as Sheikh al-Azhar, Al-'Abbasi was "counted as a follower of (Khedive) Tawfiq"<sup>76</sup> and generally seen as politically conservative.

For 'Urabi and the nationalists, al-Abassi's opposition to their movement was a constant thorn in their side and 'Urabi, together with pro-nationalist 'ulama, made a very public attempt to eliminate this threat by removing him from office. When this did not return the precise desired result and al-'Abassi was relinquished of the post of Sheikh al-Azhar but remained in his position of Grand Mufti, they tried to compromise

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<sup>73</sup> Al-Sa'idi, op. cit. *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar*, pp.34–43.

<sup>74</sup> Eccel, op. cit. *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change*, p.123. See also Gesink, op. cit. *Islamic Reform*, pp.52–53.

<sup>75</sup> Peters, op. cit. 'The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge', p.216.

<sup>76</sup> Schölch op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.189.



his position here. These two events show how the elite 'ulama and control of al-Azhar became key battlegrounds for the Khedive and the opposition nationalist movement in terms of lending their cause Islamic legitimacy and being able to count on the 'ulama's support to influence popular opinion in their favour.

Soon after the 'Abdin confrontation, rumours began to circulate that Khedive Tawfiq had asked Sheikh al-Abassi to issue a fatwa denouncing 'Urabi and declaring his insubordinate behaviour a capital crime. It was also rumoured that Sheikh al-Abassi had agreed to oblige the Khedive. The issuing of this fatwa would have been highly damaging to 'Urabi and might have compromised many of the gains and successes 'Urabi and the nationalists had made in the preceding months. In particular, it was thought that Khedive Tawfiq had requested the fatwa because he wanted to reverse some of the concessions he had made to 'Urabi during the 'Abdin incident. Declaring 'Urabi's insubordination to the Khedive would open the way to question the behaviour of 'Urabi and all of his demands.<sup>77</sup> Even though the fatwa from al-'Abbasi never materialized, 'Urabi always felt threatened by this possibility and continued to try to silence al-'Abbasi right up until his military defeat at the hands of the British forces in September 1882.<sup>78</sup> In fact, according to Muhammad 'Abduh, one of 'Urabi's demands as early as the 'Abdin confrontation was the dismissal of al-Abassi as Sheikh al-Azhar, which clearly shows 'Urabi's intentions.<sup>79</sup>

In seeking to remove al-'Abassi from office, 'Urabi encouraged pro-nationalist 'ulama within al-Azhar, most notably Sheikh 'Illaish and his followers, to agitate for al-Abassi's dismissal. The strength of 'ulama opposition to al-'Abassi forced the Government to set up a committee to determine al-Abassi's appropriateness as Sheikh al-Azhar.<sup>80</sup> The committee could find nothing wrong with al-Abassi's tenure as Sheikh al-Azhar but by this time the strength of feeling and opposition to al-Abassi was so strong amongst Azharites that the Khedive was forced to dismiss the Sheikh

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. See also Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*.

<sup>78</sup> Peters, op. cit. 'The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge', p.217.

<sup>79</sup> Rida, op. cit. *Tarikh al-Ustadh Muhammad 'Abduh*, Vol. 1, Part 1, pp.219–24.

<sup>80</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.189.

al-Azhar on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1881. In the election for al-'Abbasi's successor as Sheikh al-Azhar that followed, over 4,000 Azharites are said to have taken part with only 25 dissenters and, while Sheikh 'Illaish's nomination to the post of Sheikh al-Azhar was vetoed by the Khedive, he was promoted to the position of Deputy Sheikh al-Azhar on 11<sup>th</sup> December, with Sheikh Muhammad al-Imbabi (1824–1896) assigned the position of Sheikh al-Azhar as a compromise.<sup>81</sup> Because al-Imbabi lacked popular support amongst Azharites, his compromise appointment suited 'Urabi and the pro-nationalist 'ulama, who must have felt that 'Illaish's greater authority amongst the 'ulama of al-Azhar would be able to counter al-Imbabi's appointment.<sup>82</sup>

Alexander Schölch defies the dominant view that Sheikh al-'Abassi's dismissal was linked to 'Urabi when he argues that "the deposition of the Shaikh [Sheikh] al-Azhar was not, as has been claimed repeatedly, the work of 'Urabi but the result of disputes within Azhar itself which were triggered off by the changed political situation".<sup>83</sup> However, the events leading up to and including the deposition of Sheikh al-'Abassi overwhelmingly support the notion that 'Urabi stood to gain from the deposition of al-Abassi and the two were in fact connected. 'Urabi's mistrust of al-'Abassi stemmed from the fact that he was a Khedival appointment, which, according to 'Urabi, would ultimately determine al-'Abassi's loyalty. To have Egypt's Sheikh al-Azhar publicly reject 'Urabi and the nationalists by issuing a fatwa to this effect would have been highly damaging and would surely have led to a decline in his popular support. Clearly then it would have been advantageous to 'Urabi to have a friendly, even pro-nationalist, Sheikh al-Azhar.

The Qasr al-Nile incident in February 1881 and the 'Abdin confrontation in September 1881 show the extent to which the Khedive had become politically weak and had lost much of his authority. By September 1881, he had lost control of the Government with 'Urabi and the nationalists first removing the Minister of War and then forcing

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp.189–90. See also Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History* and al-Rafi'i, op. cit. *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.164.

<sup>82</sup> 'Ali Mubarak, op. cit. *al-Khittat at-Tawfiqiyya*, Vol. 4, pp.41–3. Here 'Ali Mubarak describes Sheikh 'Illaish as "a man of high courage and religious authority".

<sup>83</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians!*, p.190.

the dismissal of the entire Government. Similarly, these incidents show that the Khedive had also lost control of the army as the army had during this time come out in support of 'Urabi and the nationalists. The dismissal of Sheikh al-Abassi in December 1881 demonstrates that the Khedive had also lost his authority in the religious sphere.

Both the 'Urabists and the Khedive competed fiercely for the support of the 'ulama of al-Azhar, demonstrating that the religious sphere had become an important constituency for the contending political forces. By and large, it was the support of the senior or 'elite' 'ulama whom 'Urabi and the nationalists and the Khedive were vying for, as it was the senior 'ulama who were able to encourage and enlist wider support from other junior 'ulama and the population. However, the 'ulama themselves appear divided during this period and can in no way be seen to have wholly supported either camp. Rather, the concerns of the 'ulama seem to have been complex and varied, sometimes overlapping. Where points of convergence seemed likely, these often became points at which the opinions of senior 'ulama in fact diverged, as in the case of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh, Sheikh Muhammad 'Ilaish and Sheikh al-'Abbasi.

Categorizing the 'ulama depending on their stance towards the Ottoman Empire, the Khedive or 'Urabi and the nationalists, while important, is still not adequate in analysing their views, as their stance was frequently intertwined with other more complex concerns, such as foreign intervention, contested Islamic principles of authority and equally divided opinions on community and loyalty to the notion of the 'umma and the role of the nation. In the same way, categorizing 'ulama as "official" or "unofficial" in the state- or al-Azhar-appointed 'ulama hierarchy or in the sufi orders, as de Jong does, seems also to throw up more problems than answers. De Jong argues that:

*[s]ince none of the heads of the officially recognised orders is known to have played a role either in the events leading up to the insurrection or in the insurrection itself, it seems reasonable to explain their apparent political*

*aloofness as being the consequence of this aspect of the structure of [Sheikh 'Abd] al-Bakri's power position.*<sup>84</sup>

The structure of the 'ulama in the nineteenth century is indeed intimately linked to the structure of the sufi orders but, where Sheikh al-Bakri may have been “performing an umbrella function”<sup>85</sup> for the heads of the official sufi orders, there were unofficial orders that had official senior 'ulama as their heads. Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish, for instance, “held supreme leadership of a Shahdiliyya order, al-'Arabiyya”,<sup>86</sup> which appears to have been an ‘unofficial’ order in de Jong’s categorization, but it is also well known that he was one of the highest 'alims in the country through his official posts as Maliki Mufti and then later as Deputy Sheikh a-Azhar. This example shows that the status of ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’ needs to be properly explored and may not give an accurate picture of the views and opinions of 'ulama in either of these categories.

As for 'Urabi and the nationalists, by the end of 1881 they had emerged as the dominant political force within Egypt. After the 'Abdin incident, and particularly in the first half of 1882, Khedive Tawfiq and the 'Urabists struggled and competed with each other for the support of the Ottoman Sultan. For the nationalists, the Sultan’s endorsement of their movement would demonstrate to the population of Egypt, still largely loyal to the Caliph, that, by supporting 'Urabi and the nationalists, they were also supporting the Caliph and the wider Islamic 'umma. Conversely, Khedive Tawfiq hoped that persuading the Sultan to back his rule in Egypt would undermine 'Urabi and the nationalists and bolster his own Islamic credentials in the eyes of the population as the legitimate ruler of Egypt. The 'ulama became integral to this struggle. Both the nationalists and the Khedive sought to co-opt the 'ulama in order to strengthen their domestic support as well as to underline their Islamic authority and credentials to the Ottoman Sultan. While pro- and anti-Ottoman tendencies existed among the 'ulama, for both the Khedive and 'Urabi, 'ulama support conferred on their

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<sup>84</sup> De Jong, op. cit. ‘The Sufi Orders in Egypt’, p.132.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.133.

movements Islamic legitimacy and a clear sign to the Ottoman Sultan that their rule – either Khedival or nationalist – would be Islamic and that they possessed the support of their local 'ulama, ensuring Egypt's continued position within the Islamic 'umma.

## **Chapter 7**

### **In Defence of Islam and the Nation: ‘Ulama, Fatawa and the Popular Press**

‘Urabi and the nationalist movement included a strong pro-nationalist element of the ‘ulama which became increasingly important and influential to ‘Urabi and the nationalist movement as shown in the previous chapter. Chapter 6 of this thesis also argued that the ‘ulama – both within conservative and reformist and official and unofficial circles – found themselves between a number of contending loyalties in the years 1879 to the early part of 1882. The rise of a native nationalist movement in Egypt raised questions about their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and the Sultan as well as forcing the ‘ulama to re-examine their relationship with the Khedive and his rule in Egypt. The events of these years and the way ‘ulama reacted show that ‘ulama responses to the emerging crisis were varied, complex and depended on numerous contending factors.

Many ‘ulama remained loyal to the Khedive and rejected ‘Urabi and the nationalist movement on the grounds that it did not have the authority to challenge Khedival rule given its direct link to the authority of the Ottoman Sultan. Moreover, anti-nationalist ‘ulama saw opposition to the Khedive as also jeopardising both Egypt’s position within the Ottoman Empire and by extension its position within the Muslim ‘umma. Indeed, with the Ottoman Empire already in crisis and in a weak position, many ‘ulama saw ‘Urabi’s efforts to gain national independence for Egypt as significantly contributing to the crisis of Empire and a further weakening of the ‘umma. These ‘ulama also saw an emergent nationalist movement defying Khedival authority which the European powers would not tolerate, thereby increasing the likelihood and extent of European involvement in Egypt.

On the other hand, there were members of the ‘ulama who constituted a strong support constituency for ‘Urabi and the nationalist cause. Pro-nationalist ‘ulama argued that the Khedive had lost authority to rule Egypt because of his subservience to the European powers in particular Britain, and had failed to limit European influence in

Egypt resulting in prolonging Egypt's economic decline and hardship because of the Dual Control and the injustice of its debt payments. But if they saw Egypt's debt crisis as a reflection of the desire of the European powers to keep Egypt subjugated and weak, they also viewed European involvement as having a strong anti-Islamic dimension. 'Ulama support of 'Urabi was, in contradiction to their anti-nationalist colleagues, based on establishing a government in Egypt able to limit the influence of the European powers and re-build ties with the Ottoman Empire reasserting Egypt's Islamic identity at the heart of the 'umma. There were also those pro-nationalist 'ulama who cared little for the Ottoman Empire and the authority of the Sultan but who came to see the nationalist movement as an opportunity for Egypt to embark on a new process of modernisation incorporating an authentic Islam as part of the national vision.

Britain's military involvement and subsequent invasion of Egypt in the second half of 1882 represents the final and in many ways decisive phase of the 'Urabi Revolt. 'Urabi's emergence as a strong oppositional political force within Egypt by the end of 1881, was seen by Britain as a major threat to their interests despite assurances from the nationalists to honour the debt repayments and retain the Dual Control. In protecting these interests, the British Government sought to counter the emergence of the nationalist movement by bolstering support for Khedive Tawfiq and reinforcing Khedival authority. When this policy failed, and the Khedive was unable to re-assert his authority and rule in Egypt, British policy transformed into seeking a military solution. The British position towards the emergence of a local nationalist movement was both hostile and rejectionist.

The British invasion of Egypt was largely as a result of Khedive Tawfiq being unable to rule Egypt from May 1882. This chapter will explore the 'ulama's role in relation to the Khedive's loss of power and legitimacy during this period and their role in mounting opposition to the British invasion. In both circumstances the 'ulama were crucial actors where they used their moral and Islamic legal authority to de-legitimise the Khedive's rule and their vast networks around the country to implore ordinary Egyptians to join an armed struggle to defend Islam and the Egyptian nation against British invasion. Up until then, the 'ulama had been crucial in efforts to oppose the

Khedive's rule in cooperation with 'Urabi and the nationalists, but events from May 1882 led the nationalists to believe the only way Egypt was to emerge from its crisis was to bring about the Khedive's deposition if necessary, in opposition to the Ottoman Sultan. Having secured the 'ulama's support on this issue and obtained a fatwa from senior 'ulama permitting the Khedive's deposition, 'Urabi and the nationalists continued to run the country in defiance of the Khedive, the European powers and the Ottoman Sultan. Britain countered this move by invading Egypt in an attempt to re-impose the Khedive's rule, and once again, the 'ulama and the nationalists found common ground on which to oppose the invasion with 'ulama as part of the efforts to dispel the invasion. However, by late September 1882 British forces had overwhelmed the resistance and had captured Cairo and 'Urabi and many of his nationalist collaborators including a number of 'ulama were arrested and put on trial with the Khedive restored to power.

### **'Ulama and the Fatwa of Deposition**

When Khedive Tawfiq dismissed the nationalist government on 26 May 1882, the response from 'Urabi and the nationalists was to call for the Khedive's deposition. On the evening of 27 May, a meeting took place at the house of Sultan Pasha, the wealthy landowner and leader of Parliament. During this meeting, 'Urabi addressed those present and spoke of the injustices of the dynasty of Muhammad 'Ali and at the end accused Khedive Tawfiq for being responsible for allowing the British and French fleets to intimidate the government and people of Egypt. Present at the meeting were a number of army officers, parliamentarians, and numerous notables and 'ulama including the prominent al-Azhar Sheikhs Abd al-Rahman Nafez and Abd al-Hadi al-Ibiary and in a comment directed specifically, but not entirely at the pro-nationalist 'ulama that were present, 'Urabi insisted that Khedive Tawfiq's actions were "against the precepts of religion".<sup>1</sup> After ending his speech with the judgement that Khedive

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed 'Urabi, *Mudhakirat al-Za'im Ahmed 'Urabi: Kashf al-Setar 'An Ser al-Asrar fi al-Nahda al-Misriyya al-Mashhura bil-Thawra al-'Urabiyya* (*The Diaries of the Leader Ahmed Urabi: Unveiling the Secret of all Secrets on the Egyptian Renaissance Known as the Urabi Revolution*) (Studied and edited by Dr 'Abd al-Mon'im Ibrahim al-Jemi'i). Cairo, Dar al-Kutub, 2005, Vol. 2, p.596.



Tawfiq deserved to be deposed, the audience became excited by this prospect and loudly began repeating 'Urabi's words demanding the Khedive's deposition.<sup>2</sup>

Although 'Urabi had already requested the Khedive's deposition in a letter to the Sultan on 25 May 1882,<sup>3</sup> the Sultan did not oblige fearing that such a move may have provoked a military reaction from the British and French fleets who would see this as an attempt to sideline their interests in Egypt. When 'Urabi realised that the Sultan would not issue a firman of deposition, he decided to consult the Egyptian pro-nationalist 'ulama on the matter, who had already shown their desire to depose Khedive Tawfiq in the meeting at the house of Sultan Pasha. After consulting with them and being sure of a favourable response, 'Urabi took the unprecedented step of formally requesting a fatwa from members of the 'ulama on the legality, according to Islamic law of Khedive Tawfiq's right to continue to rule Egypt. The fatwa and the request was found by 'Urabi's lawyer in his personal papers after 'Urabi was arrested and is reproduced in full here:

*Oh ye Notables and most learned Ulemas, who give wise counsel to the Moslems, who keep the Mussulman law spotless and pure, and who watch over the execution of its precepts, incline your ear and answer to the questions put by the Egyptian Nation in the following lines. Give sound advice, and may you be guided aright, and may God work well through you and point out the straight path!*

*What say you of a Sovereign who, being named by the Prince of the Faithful to govern his subjects with justice, and to act according to the rules of God, has violated the compact and sown dissensions among the Moslems, and has broken their staff of unity? This so-called sovereign has even gone so far as to prefer the government of the Infidels to that of the Faithful, and has asked nations who are straying from the path of the true religion to establish their power in the Mussulman country over which he rules.*

*He has been the cause of making his subjects bend before the force of the stranger, and has even gone so far as to use every effort to defend that force.*

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878–1882*, London Ithaca Press, 1981, p.241

<sup>3</sup> Hasan Adali, *Documents Pertaining to the Egyptian Question in the Yildiz Collection of the Basbakanlik Arsivi, Istanbul*, in P.M. Holt (ed.), *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt: Historical Studies from the Ottoman Conquest to the United Arab Republic*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, p.55.

*And when the Faithful counselled him to change his conduct, he refused, and stubbornly continued in his disobedience to the Sultan, and the Holy Law. Knowing this, can this sovereign legally continue to reign, to enable strangers to strengthen themselves in the country of Islam, or must he not be deposed, and another appointed in his place, who will watch over and keep the law?*<sup>4</sup>

In the *istifta* (question or request) above, the nationalists clearly try and represent the grievances of all sections of Egyptian society. So, the *istifta* is broad and general in its scope in an attempt to give voice to the disparate grievances of the 'ulama and the notables as well as the ordinary Egyptians. Therefore, in order to represent the grievances of all groups, the *istifta* comes from the 'Egyptian Nation' and not from a lone group or individual such as 'Urabi or even the army officers. By evoking the 'Egyptian Nation' the *istifta* asserts that it is in fact the entire 'Egyptian Nation' that has grievances with the Khedive and not merely a single group. In this respect, 'Urabi and the nationalists were aware of the necessity of building alliances with other social groups and were able to do this "on the grounds that they held common grievances against the Khedive".<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, the *istifta* accuses the Khedive of 'making his subjects bend before the force of the stranger'. This sentence makes reference to the injustices the various different social groups were to have felt as a result of Khedive Tawfiq's collaboration with the European Powers. So, it is meant to appeal not only to the sense of injustice felt by the *fellahin* as a result of their increased tax burden in order to service the European debt, but equally to the injustice felt by Egyptian army officers at their lack of promotions, pro-nationalist notables whose land had been confiscated by the state in order to service European debt and the 'ulama who under the Muhammad 'Ali dynasty had progressively lost many of their political and economic privileges (see

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Meyrick Broadley, *How We Defended Arabi ['Urabi] and his Friends: A Story of Egypt and the Egyptians*, London, Chapman & Hall, 1884; reprint: Cairo, Arab Research and Publishing Center, 1980, pp. 175–76.

<sup>5</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 241. Cole rightly argues that the strength of the alliance of different segments of the intelligentsia was due to their spiritual and material resources with the notables possessing enormous financial resources while the 'ulama exercised considerable moral influence over Egyptian Muslims.

chapter 3).<sup>6</sup> But as well as reminding people of the injustices they suffered under Khedive Tawfiq, this sentence also points towards the humiliating presence of Europeans in Egypt and the privileged status they enjoyed. They occupied many of the senior positions within the ministries and commercial sector and were paid vastly inflated salaries. These privileges as well as their overwhelming political influence in Egypt heightened the overwhelming sense of European domination felt by ordinary Egyptians which 'Urabi was quick to utilise when appealing to the masses.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the language of the *istifta* while pointing towards the grievances of the 'Egyptian Nation' and the injustices suffered by its people under Khedive Tawfiq is couched in language, which places Islam and the decline of Islamic unity at the heart of the request to depose the Khedive. According to the *istifta*, the first violation of Islamic unity occurs when the 'Sovereign' (Khedive Tawfiq), who occupies his position only by command of the 'Prince of the Faithful' (the Sultan), fails to govern his subjects with justice and in accordance with God, which is the basis of his compact with the Sultan. By demonstrating the Khedive's violation of this element of Islamic unity, 'Urabi no doubt had in mind two important constituents. First, he still hoped to receive the formal backing of the Sultan but second, and more close to home, he was conscious not to alienate those pro-nationalist 'ulama who sought closer Islamic ties to the Ottoman Sultan and still sought to win over the powerful anti-nationalist but pro-Ottoman Egyptian 'ulama.

The second of Khedive Tawfiq's 'violations' of Islamic unity relates to Egypt's position as part of the wider Islamic 'umma and accuses the Khedive of 'preferring the government of the Infidels to that of the Faithful'. 'Urabi and the nationalists make a clear reference to the widespread concern in Egypt and amongst the 'ulama that a greater European presence in Egypt will in fact lead to Egypt's eventual divorce from

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.106–07. Here Cole argues that Tawfiq was responsible, not only for cutting the size of the Egyptian army to 12,000 but also of "restricting the years an indigenous Egyptian could serve, thus making it impossible for sons of village headman to rise through the ranks into the officer corps". Regarding the 'ulama, Cole insists that "the state slashed seminary enrolments and kept their (the 'ulama) salaries and stipends much lower than those paid to translators and other members of the secular intelligentsia".

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.21–34

the Ottoman Empire and by extension the wider Muslim 'umma. Britain and to a lesser degree France were already largely in control of many aspects of Egypt's affairs through their Consul Generals who were the Khedive's chief advisors, the European Financial Controllers who effectively managed the Egyptian Treasury and the scores of European advisors in many of the Egyptian ministries. The *istifta* made clear reference to this and couched this in explicitly Islamic terms. Allowing non-Muslim powers to further establish 'their power in the Mussulman country' would lead to those powers pulling Egypt further away from its position at the heart of the Islamic 'umma.

Lastly, the *istifta* accuses the Khedive of defying the Holy Law. In a direct reference to the most important sources of Islamic law, being the Quran and the Prophet's Sunna, the accusation suggests the Khedive's departure from these fundamental sources of Islamic law. But more than being merely a departure from an abstract legal system, the Khedive is being accused of acting in contradiction to the Quran, which Muslims believe to be the very word of God and the first 'sacred' source of Islamic law. Moreover, in mentioning the 'Holy Law', the *istifta* also accuses the Khedive of defying the example of the Prophet contained in the Sunna another important source of Islamic law. Lastly, the development and formulation of Islamic law could not have been complete without the formation of the four *madhaahib* (legal schools) named after their founding fathers. These schools were named after the great Fuqaha (Jurists) because these men were believed to possess unique intellectual qualities and religious knowledge able, not only to understand the nature and meaning of the sacred texts of the Quran and the Prophet's Sunna (traditions), but also to formulate an entire doctrinal tradition of legal interpretation around which the sacred texts could be interpreted and applied to peoples everyday lives. By accusing the Khedive of defying 'Holy Law' meant the defiance of God, the Prophet and the great Fuqaha Imams.

The response to the *istifta* was the issuing of a fatwa by senior 'ulama from al-Azhar and which could not have expressed the opinion that the Sovereign could and should be deposed in more direct or unambiguous terms. The full text of the fatwa is as follows:

*Thanks to God and prayers and peace to our Lord Muhammed, the Messenger of God, and to his relations, friends and those who love him!*

*In this case he shall be cast out, and in his place shall be named one who will watch over the law and defend it, and respect the rights of the Prince of the Faithful, our Lord the Caliph, Successor of the Messenger of the Master of all men.*

*The Most High has said "Ye who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians as Masters one over the other, and he among you who makes one of these his master shall be considered like to them." He hath also said (Praise and honour to him!) -Do not this for then will there be troubles on the earth, and great disorders." Again he hath said, (may He be praised and exalted!) "He who does not govern in accordance with that which God has shown by revelation he is truly an infidel." Also he hath said (praise and glory to Him!) "He who does not govern according to the revealed will of God, is a sinner." And again, "He who does not govern according to the revealed Will of God, that man is an oppressor." Again, "Tell the deceitful that they shall have a terrible punishment, those who take to themselves friends among the unbelievers instead of among the faithful. Do they seek after power? Know that all power belongs to God alone.*

*He hath said (praise and glory be to Him!) "Ye who have believed, take not my enemy and yours to show kindness to him." And again, "He who doeth this, shall be considered as erring from the right way." And again, "Ye have a fair example before you in Abraham and those who were with him. They said in truth to those among whom they lived, 'We retire from you, and purify ourselves from you, and from all that you worship in the place of God. We will know you no more, and henceforth enmity and hatred shall reign between us for ever, until you shall worship the One God.'" He hath said (praise and glory be to him!), "In Abraham and his companions you have a good example, for those who trust in God and believe in the last day. He who rules is God, the Almighty to whom praise is due. He who makes friends of the Infidels is a tyrant.*

*The prophet of God hath said (God's blessing and peace be upon him!), "He who honours the power of God on earth, God will honour him on the day of Resurrection, and he who despises the sovereignty of the Lord upon earth, God shall despise him on the last day.*

*God, praise be to His name, is Omnipotent and Omniscient. May God bless our Lord the Prophet Muhamed, the most Noble, and his family and friends, great and powerful!<sup>8</sup>*

The text follows the traditional structure of the fatwa,<sup>9</sup> which in the first instance opens and closes with salutations to God and the Prophet Muhammad. The fatwa then goes on to deal with the substantive question posed in the *istifta* of whether or not the

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<sup>8</sup> Broadley, op. cit. *How we Defended Arabi*, pp.176–77.

<sup>9</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, Leiden, Brill, 1997 gives an account of the formal structures and rules of presenting a fatwa.

sovereign, who has behaved in a certain manner, should be deposed. Again, following the traditional structure of a fatwa, the opinion is given in clear and precise language without deviating from the question posed in the *istifta* and is then supported by passages and verses from the Quran and examples from the Prophet's Sunna to give the fatwa additional authority.

In many cases where the *istifta* was sensitive or was likely to have a widespread impact, it was preferable to have broad agreement amongst the 'ulama of different legal schools to further underpin the authority and applicability of the fatwa. So, in the case of this fatwa, it ends with the signatures of eight senior 'ulama from al-Azhar including the Muftis of the Maliki and Hanbali orders which is likely to have been requested either by the questioner or the Sheikh who issued the fatwa who in this case was the Mufti of the Maliki order and pro-nationalist 'alim Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish.<sup>10</sup>

But although the fatwa is signed by eight senior 'ulama from al-Azhar, there are some conspicuous absences from the list of signatories. With a fatwa of this importance, it would have been normal for the highest religious authority – that of the Sheikh al-Azhar – to have sanctioned the fatwa or given his approval of the fatwa in some way. But in this instance, even though the previous Sheikh al-Azhar Muhammad al-Abassi al-Mahdi (1827-1897) had been replaced in December 1881 as a result of protests by the pro-nationalist 'ulama of al-Azhar most likely led by Sheikh 'Illaish and instigated by 'Urabi and the nationalists (see chapter 6), his replacement, Sheikh Muhammad al-Imbabi (1824-1896) refused to sign the fatwa. Sheikh al-Imbabi's appointment as Sheikh al-Azhar had been a compromise between 'Urabi's choice of Sheikh 'Illaish and the Khedive loyalist Sheikh al-Abassi and therefore Sheikh al-Imbabi found himself torn between the two and as a consequence severely weakened by his divided

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<sup>10</sup> Broadley op. cit. *How we Defended Arabi*, p177. Here, Broadley states "eight great religious chiefs of the El Azhar" signed the fatwa but only names two of them being Sheikh 'Illaish and his close Maliki disciple Sheikh Hassan al-'Idwi. No reason is given for not mentioning the other six signatories.

loyalties. At the time, and in order to stay clear of the political crisis, he claimed ill health as an excuse for his absence from political involvement.<sup>11</sup>

But there were other senior 'ulama absent from the list of signatories, raising questions about the strength of the pro-nationalist 'ulama. Sheikh al-Abassi was one of those prominent 'ulama that refused to sign the fatwa and although he no longer held the post of Sheikh al-Azhar he was nevertheless one of the most senior 'ulama in the country and remained the highest legal authority in Egypt as Grand Mufti and head of the Hanafi order.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, both Sheikh al-Sadat and Sheikh al-Bakri, heads of the largest Sufi orders refused to sign the fatwa. Clearly, these were very senior 'ulama who refused to sign the fatwa and opposed 'Urabi and the nationalists in their attempts to depose the Khedive. Of course, 'Urabi would have preferred to have the support of these senior 'ulama and during this time, he made various attempts to diminish their reputation and authority.<sup>13</sup> One reason for their lack of support for the nationalist movement was that many of these senior 'ulama were appointed by the Khedive and as a result had clear and widely accepted political loyalties. In the case of the 'ulama that did not sign the fatwa of deposition, these political loyalties are likely to have been a major factor in deciding to resist signing the fatwa.

But much of the analysis of the 'Urabi Revolt suggests 'Urabi was in fact supported by a strong portion of 'ulama. For instance, while Blunt was in England at the time trying to persuade Prime Minister Gladstone to resist a military intervention in Egypt, Sabunji, his aide in Cairo kept him informed of events through almost daily telegrams and letters. In them, he refers to the 'ulama on numerous occasions and announces, "all the Azhar Sheykhs [Sheikhs] except Embabeh [Imbabi], el Abbasi, and the Sheykh

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<sup>11</sup> Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1907, pp. 326–30. Telegram from Blunt's aide in Cairo Sabunji dated 11 June 1882

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Atif Ahmed, *Islam, Modernity, Violence and Everyday Life*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009; see especially the chapter on al-Abbasi's fatawa entitled "Egyptian Society in the Writings of Muhammad al-'Abassi al-Mahdi (1827-1897)".

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 5 of this thesis discusses 'Urabi's role in the deposition of Sheikh al-Abbasi from the position of Sheikh al-Azhar.

el Saadat are supporting Arabi”.<sup>14</sup> Sabunji’s first-hand account of the support from the ‘ulama, is further confirmed when he reports his attendance at a number of meetings that take place at al-Azhar attended by “Ulema and other persons ... [where] the Koran and the Hadith were freely quoted, showing the unfitness of Tewfik to rule over a Mussulman community”.<sup>15</sup> The apparent openness of the discussion to depose Khedive Tawfiq coupled with the discussion and meetings being carried out in an openly public place (Sabunji details in his account that the discussion took place in the Azhar Mosque where prayers are offered), points towards the fact that this may have been the dominant view amongst the ‘ulama and that rather than keep the discussions secret, the ‘ulama appear to discuss this highly sensitive issue fearlessly and in the public domain.

Finally, while the ‘ulama who did not sign the fatwa may have been senior figures in the formal religious sphere, their authority and indeed their support base had dramatically declined. Firstly, under Sheikh al-Imbabi, the office of Sheikh al-Azhar underwent a crisis of authority because of the way al-Imbabi had been appointed. Imbabi’s elevation to this post was not a popular choice and his appointment, as mentioned previously was a compromise which weakened his position and resulted in him not being able to command adequate moral authority associated with previous incumbents of the Rectorate.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in the case of Sheikh al-Abbasi, his moral authority had declined considerably since he was forced out from the position of Sheikh al-Azhar. Never before had a previous Sheikh al-Azhar been forced to leave this post with the custom being that all new Sheikh al-Azhars were only ever appointed

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<sup>14</sup> Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*, pp.326–30. In this telegram, he also talks of a meeting between the ‘ulama and Darwish Pasha, the Ottoman envoy sent by the Sultan to Egypt to settle the Egyptian crisis where all the ‘ulama except two (Sheikhs Bahrawi and Abyari) come out in support of ‘Urabi and the nationalists. Both Blunt and by extension Sabunji, were close to and highly trusted by the nationalists and while they were no doubt being fed information in the hope that it would reach the relevant people in the British Government and have the desired effects on their political actions, the extent of local support for ‘Urabi which Sabunji describes in his telegrams is nevertheless corroborated by other first hand accounts of the events of the time including those contained in the accounts by Broadley, Shafique, ‘Urabi, al-Nadim, ‘Abduh and ‘Ali Mubarak to name only a few.

<sup>15</sup> Blunt, op. cit. *Secret History*, p.330.

<sup>16</sup> Abd al-Muta’al al-Sa’idi, *Ta’rikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar (History of Reform in al-Azhar)*, Egypt, al-Itimad, 1943; see also Sa’od, Muhammad Abd al-Azeem, *al-Azhar w’al-Shayukh (al-Azhar and the Sheikhs)* Egypt, al-Jumhuriyya Press, 2001, pp.17–38



on the death or severe ill health of previous ones. Abbasi had been removed because of internal dissension among the 'ulama of al-Azhar which in all likelihood was triggered by the pro-nationalist 'ulama. Finally, the political and moral stock of the two most powerful Sheikhs of the Sufi orders – Sheikhs al-Sadat and al-Bakri – had been in decline for many years.<sup>17</sup> Both of these positions were hereditary positions passed from Father to son and both of these Sheikh hoods were largely responsible for the elevation of Muhammad 'Ali to the governorship and ultimately to rule Egypt in 1805. With 'Urabi and the nationalists turning against Khedive Tawfiq and Muhammad 'Ali's dynasty increasingly discredited with the endless crises engulfing Egypt, these Sheikhs found their moral authority had declined by the middle of 1882.

### **Fatawa and the Politics of Legitimacy**

The fatwa secured by 'Urabi on the Khedive's permissibility to continue to reign in Egypt was one example of where religion, faith and politics merged and in particular, where the fatwa was used as a tool to de-legitimise the Khedive and to confer greater legitimacy on opposition to his rule. In Chapter 6, I discussed the role of Sheikh al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi and his opposition to 'Urabi and the nationalist cause where the pro-nationalist 'ulama were prominent agitators in his dismissal from the office of Sheikh al-Azhar in December 1881. But as mentioned in chapter 6, after his dismissal, he retained the position of Grand Mufti, the highest legal office in Egypt and because of his continued prominence as a vociferous opponent of the nationalists he remained a constant thorn in the side of 'Urabi's movement. The efforts that brought about his dismissal as Sheikh al-Azhar were politically motivated by 'Urabi in order to monopolise as much as he could the support of the 'ulama and to discredit those who opposed the nationalist cause. Hatina rightly points out that the “micro-struggle over the religious leadership at al-Azhar was intertwined with the macro-struggle over Egypt's political hegemony”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *Asr Ismail (Ismail's Era)*, Cairo, 1932, 3 vols.

<sup>18</sup> Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 2010, p.45

Having secured the fatwa of deposition against the Khedive and with Egypt at war with Britain, 'Urabi felt his own Islamic credentials as protector of the homeland and its Islamic identity needed bolstering in an effort to attract greater numbers to take up arms against the British. Once again, 'Urabi turned his attention to al-'Abbasi as Grand Mufti and requested a fatwa on what appears to be an Islamic matter but that had unmistakable political undertones which 'Urabi hoped would have significant political implications. Previously, his successful efforts to oust al-'Abbasi as Sheikh al-Azhar resulted from rumours circulating that al-'Abbasi was to give a fatwa denouncing 'Urabi and the nationalists as rebels in order that the Khedive could reverse some of the concessions he was forced to give from the 'Abdin Palace incident in September 1881.<sup>19</sup> The fatwa was never given but the rumours suggest that the boundaries between religion and politics were becoming increasingly blurred with both sides recognising the importance of the 'ulama in providing Islamic legitimacy and a religious base to their political causes.

In late August 1882, as the invasion was looking increasingly unstoppable with British forces advancing through Egypt's Delta region, 'Urabi, through the Sheikh al-Azhar al-Inbabi made a request for a fatwa from Sheikh al-'Abbasi on "the obligation to remove images of human beings and animals".<sup>20</sup> The fatwa sought the Islamic justification to remove the statue of Ibrahim Pasha in the centre of the Azbakiyya district near the minaret of the Azbakiyya mosque and the statues of lions, erected around the same time during the reign of Khedive Isma'il at both ends of the Qasr al-Nil bridge. When the statues were initially erected, in particular the statue of Ibrahim Pasha, the public reacted angrily as indeed they offended the Islamic traditions associated with the public display of images and statues.<sup>21</sup> Couched in Islamic terms, the request makes clear the statues were contrary to Islam

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<sup>19</sup> Rudolph Peters, 'The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge: The Islamic Prohibition of Images as an Issue in the 'Urabi Revolt' in Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, David S. Powers (eds) *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, p.216.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.214.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Baer, *Islamic Political Activity in Modern Egyptian History: A Comparative Analysis*, in G.R Warburg and U. Kupferschmidt (eds.), *Islam, Nationalism and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, New York, Praeger, 1983, p.262.

*for the religion of Islam forbids us to erect idols such as the ones that the Companions of the Prophet destroyed when they entered Mecca the Honourable, so as to comply with the obligations of the religion.* <sup>22</sup>

Although on the surface, the request appears to be a religious matter, seen within the context of the 'Urabi Revolt, the political nature of the request and the political effects 'Urabi hoped to achieve are clear. The areas of Cairo in which the statues stood were well populated and in removing them, 'Urabi wished to make this act as public an act as possible to demonstrate his adherence to orthodox Islamic principles. Removing the statues would demonstrate the nationalists Islamic credentials in a very public way and promote the perception that rule by the nationalists meant a greater link to and retention of Islam within Egypt. This was synonymous and consistent with the nationalist strategy from the outset of associating their nationalism with protection of the nation and to safeguard Islam's position with it. In this key aspect of the nationalist struggle, the 'ulama became a vital constituency as the interpreters of Islam and Shari'a and the guardians of the faith. And as politics converged with the emergence of nationalism, 'ulama found they possessed greater political importance which they used in both supporting and rejecting the nationalist movement.

The removal of the statues was meant as a clear sign to Egyptians that the nationalists considered the Muhammad 'Ali dynasty's reign and the European influence in Egypt as illegitimate. The removal of the statues was an attack on the whole dynasty and in many respects what it had done to Egypt over the course of the nineteenth century. The statue itself was of Ibrahim Pasha, son of the founder of the dynasty and a brilliant commander and army general. Under Ibrahim Pasha's command, Egyptian forces had brought the Ottoman Empire's eastern territory under Muhammad 'Ali's control and it was only when Muhammad 'Ali planned to attack territory in Ottoman heartland was he restrained mainly by the European powers. If Muhammad 'Ali symbolised the reformist and modernising aspect of the dynasty, Ibrahim Pasha was the symbol of its military strength. The symbolism of demolishing the statue of Ibrahim Pasha was also

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<sup>22</sup> Peters, op cit. 'The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge', p. 217

linked to him being the “father and grandfather, respectively, of ‘Urabi’s adversaries, the Khedives Isma’il and Tawfiq”.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of the fatwa on al-‘Abbasi himself and his loyalty to the Khedive should also not be ignored or overlooked. Al-‘Abbasi’s opinion of the nationalist movement was well-known consistently supporting the Khedive throughout the crisis arguing that his authority could only be challenged by the Ottoman Sultan. But grounds for the destruction of the statues was quite clear in Islamic law based on the prohibition of making images or copying God’s creation and on the basis that idolatry was a practice of the unbelievers in the period of *jahiliyya* in pre-Islamic times.<sup>24</sup>

‘Urabi recognised that by asking al-‘Abbasi for the fatwa, he would be putting the Grand Mufti in a very difficult position. Either al-‘Abbasi would have to give the fatwa thereby compromising his position with the Khedive and at the same time giving ‘Urabi and the nationalists permission to destroy the statues which would no doubt have a positive effect for the movement’s popular appeal. Or, in the event that al-‘Abbasi denied the charge in the fatwa request and failed to agree on such a fundamental and clear issue in Islamic law, he would have left himself open to criticism from other ‘ulama, accusations of favouritism towards the Khedive or worse still being under the influence of the Khedive. Al-‘Abbasi obliged and issued the fatwa on 31 August 1882 knowing well that failing to give his opinion in the affirmative on such a clear case would probably have led to widespread demands for his removal from office or that his position as Grand Mufti would have been severely compromised resulting in a significant decline in his authority.

‘Urabi clearly consulted with other ‘ulama on the matter including Sheikh ‘Ilaish who had given a fatwa on the matter already. The request was put through the office of Sheikh al-Azhar Inbabi whose name appears at the beginning of the request and would have advised ‘Urabi of the legal grounds of the issue. As a reflection of al-‘Abbasi’s growing isolation, the fatwa is not signed by other ‘ulama which is unusual in a fatwa

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

of this significance. Indeed, the fatwa is contained in al-'Abbasi's seven volume collection of over 13,500 of his fatawa and it is often the case with other fatawa in this collection that those considered important are signed by leading scholars from the other main madhaahib in Egypt.<sup>25</sup> The second striking feature of the fatwa given by al-'Abbasi that is relevant to the political context of the revolt is the inclusion of a supplement to the fatwa. After giving the fatwa, al-'Abbasi attached a supplement at the bottom of the fatwa – a highly irregular practice which is not replicated in any of the other fatawa in his collection – where al-'Abbasi draws attention to issues outside the scope of the request. The supplement reads as follows:

*The rulers of the Muslims must remove everything in their countries that is objectionable [munkar], such as practicing usury [riba], the opening of places known as brothels [karakhanat] and bars [khammarat], and other offences [mubiqat]. [They also must] prevent God's servants from suffering wrongs contrary to the Shari'a and forbid injustice and [the application of] rules other than those revealed by God. This is more urgent.*<sup>26</sup>

The supplement serves to caution 'Urabi and divert attention from the main issues to what al-'Abbasi calls 'more urgent' issues. Here, al-'Abbasi is referring to the moral corruption of society which constitutes a veiled challenge to 'Urabi to address as one of the leaders of society. But also importantly al-'Abbasi reiterates the need to remain within the rules revealed by God and it is on this point that al-'Abbasi had previously criticised 'Urabi for his efforts to depose the Khedive. Just as al-'Abbasi was probably aware of the political nature of the request on the statues, his supplement steps outside the legal domain and can be seen as constituting a political message to 'Urabi and others regarding the grounds on which they had deposed the Khedive as being outside Islamic tradition. Peters rightly argues that the supplement implies "that 'Urabi had in fact been slack in enforcing the religious commands and did not deserve to be regarded as a defender of Islam".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi, *Al-Fatawa al-Mahdiyya fi'l Waqa'I al-Misriyya (The Mahdi Fatwas on Egyptian Events)*. The fatwa appears in Vol. 5, pp.29–300 and is dated 16 Shawwal 1299 (31 August 1882).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Peters, op. cit. 'The Lions of Qasr al-Nil Bridge', p. 220.

## Majlis al-'Urfi and the Formal Deposition

The absence of support from the pro-Khedival 'ulama in response to 'Urabi's *istifta* illustrates the contending political loyalties being played out at the time and the lines of internal debate and conflict within elite 'ulama circles. However, by the middle of 1882, pro-nationalist 'ulama were dominating both the internal debates within 'ulama circles and the political environment and as a result, popular support for the nationalist movement was high. Pro-nationalist 'ulama had managed to compromise much of the authority of the pro-Khedival 'ulama and with the Khedive morally discredited and lacking popular support, he appealed more desperately to the Ottoman Sultan and the European Powers to intervene on his behalf. By the middle of June 1882, the Khedive considered his life was under threat and "placed himself under the direct protection of the fleet".<sup>28</sup> The bombardment of Alexandria took place on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July and with this, the Khedive now left Cairo and retired to Alexandria to the heavily fortified Ra'as al-Tin palace where he remained under the protection of British troops.<sup>29</sup> For 'Urabi and the nationalists, this offered the chance to finally execute the formal deposition of the Khedive.

The fatwa of deposition was requested by 'Urabi sometime at the end of May 1882 before the Khedive had put himself under British protection which raises questions over whether this act was behind the request for the fatwa which in the end was issued in the first week of June 1882.<sup>30</sup> But, even though the fatwa had been issued, the formal deposition of the Khedive did not occur until 29 July 1882. The delay between the issuing of the fatwa in early June and the formal enactment of the deposition at the end of July occurs for two reasons. First after the resignation of the Mahmud Sami government on 26 May 1882, Egypt effectively remained without a government until the Khedive appointed the Raghīb Pasha government on 18 June 1882. So although

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<sup>28</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians*, pp.252–53.

<sup>29</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, p.587. After the bombardment, Britain landed troops in Alexandria and awaited further instructions.

<sup>30</sup> Blunt op. cit. *Secret History*, p.326. Telegram from Sabunji to Blunt dated 11<sup>th</sup> June 1882. In this, Sabunji informs Blunt that "Sheykh Aleysh ['Illaish] the great holy man of the Azhar, has issued a fetwa [fatwa] in which he states that the present Khedive ... is no more worthy of ruling over the Moslems of Egypt".

the fatwa had been issued, there existed no formal political authority that could execute the ruling of the fatwa. The second reason for the delay was because even though a government had been established after 18 June, attempts were made at reconciliation with 'Urabi himself going to Alexandria to meet Khedive Tawfiq in order to accept the new government and show his willingness to work with it.<sup>31</sup>

But any chance of reconciliation was ruined by British determination to invade Egypt in order to destroy 'Urabi and the nationalists which they had thus far failed to do. First, Britain had failed to enable Khedive Tawfiq to limit the power of the nationalist movement in Egypt and 'Urabi had emerged from that confrontation in a much stronger position. Equally, Britain failed in persuading the Ottoman Sultan to send his troops to Egypt to restore order and the authority of the Khedive. Finally, when Darwish Pasha's mission to Egypt in June 1882 also failed to bring about the downfall of 'Urabi and the nationalists, Britain decided to take direct action. Britain's bombing of Alexandria devastated the city and reduced it to rubble from its gunships in the harbour.<sup>32</sup> When the Khedive arrived in Alexandria on 13 July followed by his ministers, the opportunity presented itself to 'Urabi and the nationalists to clarify and ask questions once again about whether the Khedive, by placing himself under the protection of British troops and having left the capital at a time of high crisis "could still be regarded as the ruler of Egypt and whether the country still had a government capable of action, authorised to make binding decisions".<sup>33</sup>

Soon after, on 17 July a meeting was convened by Yaqoub Sami, the Deputy War Minister on 'Urabi's request to discuss the running of the country, war preparations and the deposition of the Khedive. This was to be the first meeting of the *Majlis al-'Urfi* (Customary Parliament) which was to effectively run the country during the war

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<sup>31</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*. p.516; see also Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians*, p.254.

<sup>32</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, pp.578–87; see also Schölch, op.cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians*, pp.257–58. Both accounts mention that Britain's 'excuse' for firing on Alexandria was that it accused the Egyptian military of fortifying the forts at Alexandria for war. In fact, 'Urabi states no fortifications were taking place and Schölch claims that Admiral Seymour, commander of the British fleet confessed on 6 July "that in fact no work was being done".

<sup>33</sup> Schölch, op. cit. *Egypt for the Egyptians*, p.260.

months. The meeting heard cases for, and against the Khedive's deposition with the Khedive's supporters claiming only an imperial firman from the Sultan could depose the Khedive. Those speaking for his deposition were Sheikh 'Abduh, Sheikh 'Illaish and Sheikh 'Idwi and as expected they claimed the Khedive had betrayed Islam and the Egyptian nation.<sup>34</sup> Without coming to a conclusion on the matter, a six man commission was set-up and asked to visit the Khedive in Alexandria to establish whether he was there as a captive of the British forces who had landed in Alexandria or on his own will. When, on the 29 July, the *Majlis al-'Urfi* met again the decision was taken to depose the Khedive and establish a substitute government with the deputy ministers now taking full responsibility for the ministries and their workings.

The 'ulama's arguments at the meeting and indeed their fatwa appear to have been crucial in obtaining the support needed for the deposition. Again attendees disagreed but the main pro-nationalist 'ulama at the meeting are again Sheikh 'Illaish, Sheikh 'Abdu, Sheikh 'Idwi and it is significant that the arguments contained in the fatwa issued by Sheikh 'Illaish continued to be the way in which the deposition of the Khedive was framed and finally achieved.<sup>35</sup> Without the support of the pro-nationalist 'ulama, the Islamic justification for deposition would not have been possible and perhaps with it the deposition itself.

### **Nation and Religion: Debating Islam in the Popular Press**

The analysis of the fatawa above illustrates two important points in the role of 'ulama in the nationalist movement. The first is that the religious sphere became increasingly important in debates about the nation and the politics of nationalism. Issues such as Islam's role in society, the authority of 'ulama as leaders of the faith, the role of Shari'a and its legitimate interpretation were mirrored in the political debates about the model

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.263; see also al-Rafi'i, *al-Thawra al-'Urabi*, p.395. In al-Rafi'i's account of the first general meeting, he claims that over 400 people attended it. According to al-Rafi'i, the attendees included the Sheikh al-Islam (Sheikh al-Azhar Imbabi), the Grand Mufti (Sheikh al-Abbasi) and other spiritual leaders.

<sup>35</sup> *Dar al-Watha'iq* (DWQ), *Mahafiz al-Thawra al-'Urabiyya* (MTU), *Mahfazah* 42, *Wathiqah* 1216. "*Majlis al-'Urfi and its Decisions*". The decision taken on 29 July by the *Majlis al-'Urfi* declares that Khedive Tawfiq's orders are non-binding and he has apostatised from Islam.



of community Egypt was to adopt. The deposition of the Khedive and the preceding fatwa shows that religion and politics were intimately connected and furthermore, the 'ulama were integral to the relationship. Muhammad 'Ali's attempts to banish the 'ulama from having any political influence in Egypt had either been reversed or had failed.

The second important point that emerges is the debates draw attention to a range of issues and concerns upon which 'ulama took a variety of positions. Debating Islam's role in society and its relationship to politics, the 'ulama were not a homogenous group with similar opinions governed by the dogma of orthodoxy or Islamic prescription. On the contrary, 'ulama held a variety of views openly debated in the mosques, universities, and political spheres and which political leaders were influenced by and sought to incorporate into their conflicting views of Egypt's challenges and its political future.

But although the 'ulama were intensively engaged in the political debates of the time and were central to the contending political factions and their efforts to gain legitimacy and popular support, Cole asserts, that the 'ulama were slow to "make use of the new media such as the emerging printing press".<sup>36</sup> How then were 'ulama ideas about community, religion and politics disseminated throughout Egypt to a wider audience and what mediums did the 'ulama use to appeal to ordinary Egyptians the need to either support or reject the nationalist movement?

The development of the Egyptian press had begun in the reign of Muhammad 'Ali with the launch of a modest number of newspapers such as *al-Jurnal (The Newspaper)* 1813, *al-Waqa'i al-Misriyya (Egyptian Events)* 1828 and *Al-Jarida al-'Askariyya (The Journal of the Military)* 1833.<sup>37</sup> These newspapers were mainly established as government mouthpieces in order to inform people of government policies and the reform measures being undertaken. Their purpose was solely to act as a government

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<sup>36</sup> Cole, op. cit. *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East*, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Adnan Hussein Rashid, *The Press and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement in the Nineteenth Century with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Al-Nadim*, PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, pp. 10-13.

information service and they carried news and information on issues such as education, agriculture, building and infrastructure development and military affairs in a manner which promoted government policy and reform.<sup>38</sup> This narrow purpose of the press as a government information service was to remain the case up until the reign of Khedive Isma'il with 'Abbas I and Said I taking "no interest in the press".<sup>39</sup>

Under Khedive Isma'il, the popular press expanded rapidly driven both by demand and supply. An increasingly literate population had developed through the process of modernisation and an expanding state bureaucracy, which fostered a growing demand for printed material including books, periodicals and newspapers. Isma'il's desire to expand the press was fuelled by political concerns and his greater vision of "modernising the social and cultural life of his people so as to make Egypt a corner of Europe".<sup>40</sup> Aside from his cultural vision for Egypt, there were also political concerns and he recognised the importance of the press for gaining popular support for his policies, countering negative publicity and to act as a symbol of his progressive rule mainly for the benefit of his European patrons. In line with his promotion of the press which was relatively free compared to other Ottoman territories, on the supply side, he encouraged a growing number of journalists from Syria and Lebanon, to settle in Egypt and help establish and develop Egypt's press. Ziad Fahmy asserts that between 1828 and the 1860's "there were no new newspapers in Egypt"<sup>41</sup> but in the table he provides, 16 new newspapers were established between 1828 and 1879<sup>42</sup> suggesting that most of these were likely set-up during the reign of Isma'il.

Having fostered a relatively free and independent press in Egypt compared to other territories of the Empire by the 1870s, Isma'il had created the conditions for this same

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>40</sup> Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millenium of Muslim Learning*, Washington, DC, Middle East Institute, 1961, p.115.

<sup>41</sup> Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture, 1870-1919*, Cairo, American University Press, 2011, p.30; See also Rashid, op. cit. *The Press and the Egyptian Nationalist Movement*, Appendix 1. According to Rashid, 24 new newspapers and periodicals were published between 1870 and 1882.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.30.

press to criticise his policies as his rule became increasingly troubled by European debt and Egypt's economic crisis. The expanding press in the 1860s and 1870s had helped create;

*an increasingly politicised Egyptian public sphere with unprecedented large scale access to new forms of printed cultural material [which] began instilling a growing sense of civic consciousness among literate and semiliterate Egyptian urbanites.*<sup>43</sup>

Even amongst the non-literate public, the ideas and reports contained in the popular press were disseminated by public readings in coffee houses and other public spaces ensuring that despite low literacy rates in Egypt, non-literates were nevertheless kept informed of news and events. The language used in the newspapers and periodicals was often of a colloquial nature especially within the growing range of satirical magazines and periodicals which avoided the abstract language and complex grammatical structures of the printed classical Arabic and its derivative *fusha* (pronounced *fus ha*). The satirical form of journalism became increasingly popular and was initially established to veil direct criticism of the rulers which would have resulted in heavy censorship or being altogether banned with hefty punishments vetted out to its editors which often included long periods of exile. But the use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic was also meant to ensure sketches, dialogues, news and reports remained easily and more readily accessible to ordinary Egyptians. Fahmy's pioneering work in analysing Egyptian popular culture and its role in the nation-building process in Egypt from the 1870s highlights the importance of this popular medium in bridging class and linguistic divides.<sup>44</sup>

In the latter period of Isma'il's rule as it became increasingly troubled, the press voiced greater criticism against him. Despite Isma'il's efforts to muzzle the press by shutting down publications or sending their editors into exile, the mushrooming of printing houses allowed those not exiled to establish other publications under different titles and names. Those less fortunate like Yaqub Sannua who was exiled to Paris in 1878 because of the open criticism he displayed of the Khedive in his satirical newspaper

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.30.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. See especially Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

*Abu-Naddara Zarga (The Man with Blue Glasses)*, found ways of continuing their journalistic activities abroad and were able to smuggle printed material back into Egypt or continue to publish their comments and opinions in other Egyptian newspapers, journals and periodicals.<sup>45</sup> The circulation of these newspapers and periodicals is hard to quantify with accuracy. Some editors would announce their print-runs in their newspapers (see chapter 5 and section on Abdallah al-Nadim and his comments on the print run of his *al-Tankit wa'l Tabkit* which he said was 3000 copies) but given the tendency to exaggerate, these figures should be viewed cautiously. For instance, Fahmy informs us that Sannua' boasted of printing 15,000 copies of every edition but the Times correspondent in Paris estimated a more realistic figure of 7000 copies were being sent to Egypt with many being intercepted by the authorities before reaching their audience.<sup>46</sup>

As the crisis continued to unfold in Egypt with Khedive Isma'il's troubled reign giving way to Tawfiq's, the press remained intensely involved in the political debate and in the dissemination of these debates to a wider public audience. Newspapers and periodicals criticised 'Urabism and the nationalists and the Khedive in equal measure. Editors and writers like Hasan al-Shamsi and Abdallah al-Nadim spearheaded the nationalist perspective in publications such as *al-Mufid (The Informer)*; *al-Safir (The Ambassador)*; *al-Tankit wa'l Tabkit (Witticisms and Criticisms)* and *al-Taif (The Scout pronounced Taa if)*, all established in 1881. The critical social commentary in al-Nadim's *al-Tankit wa'l Tabkit* (see Chapter 5) was to become one of the most popular periodicals of the time and after eighteen issues, al-Nadim changed its name to *al-Taif*. Under its new name, the journal became much more explicitly outspoken probably as result of it being adopted as the nationalist movement's main mouthpiece and perhaps also to reflect the growing reality of confrontation with the Khedive and the British. Hasan al-Shamsi's *al-Fustat* was outspoken from the outset and in an article titled "The Military Rulings" on the front page, he makes clear his political stance and that of his newspaper al-Fustat:

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

*The Khedive has disobeyed God and instead he obeys the English and the French. God's rules must not be discarded and some faithful people have tried to advise the Khedive and his government to return to the path of God and of the Muslims but they have refused to do so. Their false convictions have overthrown them from their seat of power and they have been replaced by other honourable people who are managing the affairs of the country. As soon as 'Urabi left the Khedive in Alexandria, the city became a battle field because of the curse of the Khedive. It is clear he does not care for the suffering Muslims.*<sup>47</sup>

Al-Nadim's *al-Taif* was equally pro-nationalist but appears to focus more on the external threat to Egypt and also to view Egypt as an integral part of a larger community. In an article in his *al-Taif* he writes:

*These are the days of struggle [jihad] these are difficult days, days when we defend our country and when Egyptians fight the enemy of Egypt, the enemy of the Arabs and the enemy of Islam – The English state. This country [England] is used to taking over Islamic countries like it has done in India and its intentions are to control another country which is the passage to India. They [the English] know that access to India would be made easier by controlling the Arab world given their proximity.*<sup>48</sup>

As the conflict escalated with British forces who were by August advancing rapidly through the Delta region, the pro-nationalist press and pro-nationalist 'ulama urged Egyptians to take up arms and to contribute to the war effort. The war was increasingly seen as a jihad, a holy war to protect Egypt and Islam. The Arabic word 'jihad' has become synonymous in western literature with the concept of violent 'holy war.' Strictly speaking, this connection is only partly true and explains 'jihad' in limited terms. The three-letter root of the word – j (*jeem* in Arabic) h (*ha*) and d (*daal*) actually denotes the Arabic verb 'to struggle.'<sup>49</sup> It follows from this that 'to struggle' for something could take a host of forms, one of which may in fact be warfare in the sense that enemies 'struggle' against one and another. In Islamic terms, the Arabic verb 'to struggle' is often, but not solely used to denote a personal struggle to gain Islamic

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<sup>47</sup> *Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya*, 2007. This newspaper was found in the collection of periodicals under a different title and with most of the masthead torn away. The only details that were evident from the masthead was the appearance of Hasan al-Shamsi's name and I am certain because of the content of the article that it dates from sometime after the bombardment of Alexandria in July 1882 and is likely to be from *Al-Fustat* newspaper edited by Hasan al-Shamsi. p.1.

<sup>48</sup> Abdallah al-Nadim, *Al-Taif (The Scout)*, Issue No. 47, 28 July 1882, p.2.

<sup>49</sup> Hans Wehr (ed. J.Milton Cowan) *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, London, Macdonald & Evans Ltd., 1980, pp.142–43.

knowledge, or to remain within the bounds of orthodoxy, to struggle against worldly temptations or to struggle in debate over a matter of theology or law with adherents of a rival theological or legal school. But while the word jihad is often attached to a wide variety of usages in the Arabic language, it can also mean a struggle to defend the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam). And, just as the word has many ways in which it applies to certain circumstances, so does the struggle to defend the *dar al-Islam* and to sanction and participate in jihad have many justifications in Islamic law.<sup>50</sup>

One aspect of jihad consistently appearing in the speeches and sermons of 'ulama was the idea that years of religious neglect had led to the current crisis. According to many 'ulama, religious neglect could be seen to have pervaded Egyptian society in two main ways. First, the rulers – which made reference to the Khedival dynasty – were responsible for the misapplication of Islam and its rules,<sup>51</sup> which was brought about by lessening the Islamic influence on rulers that 'ulama had had prior to the nineteenth century. Having lost their prominence and proximity to Egypt's political rulers since the era of Muhammad 'Ali, it became increasingly difficult to influence the decisions and judgements of the rulers argued Sheikh 'Ali Miligy, a senior Sheikh from Asiut.<sup>52</sup> He argued that “they (the rulers) became more interested in their worldly lives than they were in their religion”.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, religious neglect afflicted not only the rulers but also the people who had diverged from Islamic practices and instead became caught up in practices, which were alien to Islam and were inherited from western influences. So for example, in a poem written by Sheikh Ahmad Abd al-Gany, a teacher at al-Azhar University, he urges people that they must abandon “listening to songs or playing music, getting drunk and sitting idly in cafes and instead execute the orders of 'Urabi and Allah's will”.<sup>54</sup> For the 'ulama, conservative and reformist alike,

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<sup>50</sup> Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Mediaeval and Modern Islam*, Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1977; see the chapters ‘On Jihad from Averroes’ legal handbook “*bidayat al-Mudjtahid*” and ‘The treatise “Koran and fighting” by the late Shaykh al-Azhar, Mahmud Shaltut’, translated and annotated by Rudolph Peters.

<sup>51</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, Vol. 2, pp.609–13.

<sup>52</sup> Meir Hatina, op. cit. ‘*Ulama*’, *Politics and the Public Sphere*, p.57.

<sup>53</sup> 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, Vol. 2 pp. 609–13

<sup>54</sup> Poem by Sheikh Ahmad Abd al-Gany in 'Urabi, op. cit. *Mudhakiraat*, Vol. 2, pp.613–14.

religious neglect was at the heart of Egypt's troubles and by calling for jihad, pro-nationalist 'ulama could use the language of moral and religious regeneration in order to urge people to contribute to the war effort.

The pro-nationalist press as well as calling Egyptians to jihad and forcefully using the rhetoric of jihad, also made attempts to justify it in Islamic terms. Thus al-Shamsi in his periodical *al-Fustat* cites the Quranic verse (60:10):

*God says: Ye who believe, shall I lead you to a pact that will save you from penalty. That ye believe in God and His Apostle and that ye strive in your utmost in the cause of God, with your property and your persons: that will be best for you, if ye but knew.*<sup>55</sup>

Using the rhetoric of jihad and the emotive power of holy way, al-Nadim illustrates well how the nationalist movement took a broad view of jihad and recognised that while people were needed in the armed conflict, people could also contribute other much-needed resources to ensure the call to jihad did not exclude anybody except perhaps the religious minorities. Al Nadim writes:

*Infidels everywhere take over the lands of the believers, steal their property, rape their women, mock their religion and use mosques as stables for their horses. We thank God that we have the noble hero Ahmed 'Urabi with his men who are like lions to rescue us from the real danger that surrounds us. Help him with your prayers and the wealthy among you should contribute money to the army in order that they may face the evil English enemy. Those fit to fight, go to the battlefield and others can make other kinds of contribution – all will be rewarded.*<sup>56</sup>

If the pro-nationalist press were making vocal demands to oppose the Khedive, fight jihad against the British and support 'Urabi, the anti-nationalist press was also putting forward an equally strong point of view which sought to counter the pro-nationalist narrative. Prominent anti-nationalist editors and writers included Mikha'il Abd al-Sayyid, editor of *al-Watan* (*The Nation*) est. 1877; Hasan Hosni, editor of *al-Zaman*

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<sup>55</sup> *Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya*, 2007. This newspaper was found in the collection of periodicals under a different title and with most of the masthead torn away. The only details that were evident from the masthead was the appearance of Hasan al-Shamsi's name and I am certain because of the content of the article that it dates from after sometime after the bombardment of Alexandria in July 1882 and is likely to be from *Al-Fustat* newspaper edited by Hasan al-Shamsi, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Abdallah al-Nadim, *A Telegram*, in *Al-Taif*, Issue no. 84, 13 September 1882 (front page).

(*The Time*) est. 1882 and Hamza Fathallah, editor of two newspapers published out of Alexandria including *al-Burhan (The Proof)* est. 1879 and *al-I'tidal (The Moderate)* est. 1882. The counter-narratives these and other pro-Khedival newspapers put forward reflected the views and opinions of those anti-nationalist 'ulama like Sheikh al-'Abbasi who argued that 'Urabi did not have the authority to depose a ruler who was the representative of the Sultan. Mikha'il Abd al-Sayyid wrote, just after the Revolt was put down, that:

*Ahmed 'Urabi and his people disobeyed Gods orders, His prophet, the Prince of the believers and the greatest Khedive and he angered his God and prophet when he disobeyed the Khedive's orders and ignored him.*

That 'Urabi came to represent the people of Egypt was also questioned in the anti-nationalist press. 'Urabi and his fellow army officers were portrayed as political opportunists whose selfish acts had come to harm the country and its people by bringing a destructive and pointless war to Egypt which had caused wide-scale suffering. Hamza Fathallah was an al-Azhar educated Sheikh who had taken up a career in journalism and was one of the most forceful critics of 'Urabi and the nationalists and their role in destabilising Egypt. He wrote in his *al-I'tidal* newspaper;

*Some people make their own lives miserable which is a matter for themselves but these people are easily guided back to good. Another kind make the lives of others miserable and these are the worst kind of people. In my opinion, the evilness of 'Urabi cannot be rehabilitated. The people and the country has suffered from their evil deeds – even birds, animals and non-living objects like trees and rocks have suffered due to 'Urabi's acts. Shame on you 'Urabists, you have brought shame upon Muslims and Egyptians and made a black mark in our history.<sup>57</sup>*

The military under 'Urabi came under attack and its role as defenders of the nation as well as its ability to win a war against the force of the British army. Women were frequently portrayed in the press and although these portrayals were as 'property of the nation', both sides put themselves forward as the defenders of women's honour, or argued that the other side was incapable of defending the honour of women who were the property of the nation. The editor of *Al-Zaman* Hasan Hosni wrote about an alleged

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<sup>57</sup> Hamza Fathallah, 'The Egyptians and the Crisis of the 'Urabists' in *Al-I'tidal (The Moderate)*, Issue no. 8, 2 September 1882, p.3.



incident he had heard which to him showed how the military and indeed 'Urabi could not be trusted to protect the honour of the women of the nation:

*[someone] was walking along the street and found two murdered women on the street and saw soldiers trying to rape a 14 year old girl. The man asked the soldiers to leave the girl and the soldiers replied that they had killed the two murdered women and would do the same to the girl after they took their pleasure from her but the man, with the help of some officers persuaded the soldiers to let the girl go. The men took the girl to a nearby tent where 'Urabi ordered them to leave her in his protection. Returning after a few hours to check whether the girl was recovering, he found her raped and bleeding.<sup>58</sup>*

Of course, the accuracy of the story cannot be verified but its publication illustrates the ways in which the press became an important part of the efforts to delegitimise the opposing political camp. The hostility shown towards 'Urabi or the Khedive by the nationalist or pro-Khedival press often spilled over into hostility between editors and writers themselves and these debates were often equally vicious and aimed at religious belief and morality. Al-Nadim was well known for his sharp wit and intelligence but his vicious attacks on political opponents were also well-renowned. In an article in his *al-Taif*, he attacked the religious credentials of Hamza Fathallah as well as his intellect and his faith. Al-Nadim wrote:

*We have seen a newspaper called Al-I'tidal published from Alexandria. Its editor is the apostate and heretic Hamza Fathallah, the former editor of al-Burhan. This heretic knows nothing about civilization or humanity. He slanders the Egyptians and praises the English and their deeds. He wrote an article slandering the Egyptian soldiers and Egyptian notables and at the end of his newspaper, published a statement from General Seymour [the British Military General in Egypt] calling for the surrender of all Egyptians and Muslims to the English. He encouraged people by claiming he was a member of the 'ulama who have since denied his claim. We warn our Egyptian people against reading this publication...we are surprised to see an Arabic newspaper with English opinions edited by a man who used to visit and sit within 'ulama circles claiming piety.<sup>59</sup>*

Egypt's relationship with the Sublime Porte was also often discussed in the press drawing on ideas associated to 'umma and community but at the same time to political independence and sovereignty. The pro-Ottoman title *Al-Ahwal* (The Affairs) est.

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<sup>58</sup> Hasan Hosni, 'Justice', *Al-Zaman*, Issue no. 12, 18 September 1882. p.1.

<sup>59</sup> Abdallah al-Nadim, 'News from Alexandria,' *Al-Taif*, Issue no. 49, 4 August 1882 (front page).

1882, edited by the brothers Bishara Taqla and Salim Taqla promoted a pro-Caliphal and pro-Ottoman stance and often featured news of the Ottoman delegations to Egypt and how members of the Egyptian 'ulama were warmly treated ignoring the mistreatment of the 'ulama by the hands of Darwish Pasha in June 1882. In an article reporting a meeting between Bishara Taqla and Ahmed Asad, a senior member of Darwish Pasha's Delegation, Taqla writes to reiterate the close ties between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire that:

*The Sultan is determined to protect Egypt and will not allow another country to take it over and has sent the Delegation to Egypt to make all the necessary arrangements and plans to ensure its security and stability...he [Ahmad Asad] has met the Sheikhs and other 'ulama and members of the public who all expressed their loyalty to the Caliph and assurances to obey his [the Caliphs] orders.<sup>60</sup>*

On the question of whether 'ulama used the press to disseminate their own views, two broad observations can be made. The first is that while 'ulama themselves appear to be absent as writers and journalists contributing articles and reports, or publicising their own sermons in the press, the issues being debated in the popular press were a reflection of the debates taking place within 'ulama circles in the mosques and seminaries. Islamic justifications for 'Urabi's opposition to and deposition of the Khedive appear frequently in the press as do the counter arguments insisting that only the Sultan has this authority. Egypt's relationship with the Ottoman Empire was also frequently questioned as well as Europe's role in Egypt and in particular the debt crisis, economic decline and the prospect of a greater erosion of ties with the 'umma and the Caliph. Debates at the political level were being disseminated at the popular level through the press and 'ulama were playing an important role at the political level in many cases shaping and defining the major issues of contention and debate. Furthermore, the popular press had in fact developed out of the political crisis in Egypt during the 1870s and so the relationship between politics and the press was one that was well developed despite its recent emergence. 'Ulama may not have used the press

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<sup>60</sup> Bishara Taqla, 'News from the Capital', *Al-Ahwaal*, Issue no. 5, 14 June 1882 (front page).

directly but their ideas and political positions were being discussed and disseminated on a broad range of political and religious issues.

Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that editors and journalists became more interested in reporting the political positions that various 'ulama took in relation to the political issues and 'ulama became more visible in the press and newspapers with reports detailing their support or pronouncements. As the war moved closer to its conclusion and the nationalists became more aware of their military weakness and inevitable downfall, the nationalist press increasingly carried exaggerated reports of victories against the British forces. Often, these exaggerated reports were accompanied by news that particular 'ulama had visited soldiers on the frontline before battles ensuring religious sentiment remained central to the war effort. For instance, al-Nadim wrote in his *al-Taif* that:

*Sheikh Hasan al-'Idwy [one of the Sheikhs central to the deposition of the Khedive] visited Kafr al-Dawar camp with some other 'ulama to read al-Bukhary [an authoritative collection of Hadith] and with this blessing, God gifted the fighters a great victory that same day. Later, the Sheikhs went to the eastern front and read al-Bukhary once again and passages from another book written by Sheikh al-'Idwy entitled Mashariq al-Anwar (Blossoms of the East) and they were rewarded once again with victory due to the blessings of the prophet Muhammad Peace and Blessings be Upon Him.*<sup>61</sup>

The anti-nationalist press also published reports of senior 'ulama who disagreed with the deposition orders and opposed the emergence of 'Urabi and the nationalist movement. All the political forces recognised the benefits of disseminating religious ideas as well as the moral and political judgements of the 'ulama through the popular press. The 'ulama were themselves actively engaged in this and allowed their views to be used for political purposes to further a particular political cause or to put forward a moral stance on an issue. In this way, the perception that they did not make use of the popular press needs to be reassessed.

In the brief analysis of the content of some of the newspapers and periodicals being published at the time, the evidence suggests clearly that the ideas of the 'ulama were

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<sup>61</sup> Abdallah al-Nadim, 'News from the Army on the Eastern Front – Jihad of the Soul', *Al-Taif*, Issue no. 76, 5 September 1882 (front page).

being reported and disseminated through the popular press. More difficult is the task of quantifying the impact of the press on public opinion. Further research is needed in this area but it is clear that as the 'ulama became more involved in the political issues concerning the emergence of nationalism and as opposition mounted to the Khedive, the debates in the popular press became a reflection of those being carried at the political level within which the 'ulama were increasingly prominent. The issues about Islam, authority and legitimacy that arose and were at the heart of the deposition and the fatwa on the statues analysed above were intimately connected to the political debates within the popular press.

Both the Khedive and the nationalists placed great importance on the press for promoting their respective political causes even though the press was still in its infancy. Extracts from the press above show that the debates were fierce and the issues wide-ranging but intensely focused on the political issues of day. Issues such as the deposition, political and religious legitimacy and the emergence of nationalism and its confrontation with the prevailing hegemonic political forces were frequently in the popular press. Articles and reports centred on the intentions of the British and foreign involvement in Egypt and the effects of this involvement continued to be a highly contentious issue. The press were actively engaged in these debates with some taking a tough stance by calling for jihad, others calling for calm and restraint pointing towards how for instance the European powers had assisted Egypt in managing its financial affairs. Publications also came out in support of the contending political factions supporting the achievements of the Khedive or the importance of 'Urabi's nationalist movement for the protection of Islam and of the nation. Ideas about the nation and its relationship to Islam were increasingly portrayed in the press with the use of Islamic symbolism, prayers, invocations and language replete with historical references to a 'glorious past' or past battles which served as models for the war against the British. The defence of the nation became synonymous with the defence of Islam and the 'ulama found themselves occupying a central position within the political arena once again.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis makes a contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature of Islam's role in the emergence of nationalism in the Muslim world in general and in particular in Egypt in the years 1879-1882. In particular, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the 'ulama, their internal debates, writings, fatawa and memoirs through which to try and understand their views and opinions on some of the pressing and most urgent socio-political concerns of those years. Those years, I have suggested, were years where a local nationalist movement emerged and sought to reappraise and reformulate the dominant notions of community, which Egypt was a part of since its absorption into the Muslim 'umma in the middle of the seventh century.

The emergence of nationalism in Egypt began in the early nineteenth century and was linked to a combination of processes from both outside and from within Egypt. External semi-autonomous rule by the Ottoman Empire, the threat of European imperial encroachment, and the inclusion within an emerging global economy set in motion unrelenting internal transformation including centralized state formation, economic expansion, demographic change and social upheaval. These elements of the emergence of nationalism are, to a greater or lesser degree, recognized by scholars of the subject. Where this thesis seeks to make a contribution to the theoretical debate on nationalism is to offer religion and in particular Islam as a main character in the story of the rise of nations and nationalism.

I concur with other theorists of nationalism who argue that merely emphasizing the sociological conditions under which nationalism emerges, reveals too little about the nature, character and underlying features that help us to identify the origins of nations and the relationship between nations and nationalism. What are the characteristics and traits around which nations are formed and how are these important to nationalist movements? In exploring these issues, history becomes important in defining the nation in that it reveals the elements of continuity with a past which often become important characteristics of emergent modern nations.

Religion is one of these historical characteristics of the nation and it is noticeable in the theoretical literature on nations and nationalism that scholars have generally, in recent years, relegated the importance of religion in their analysis of modern nations. Of specific concern to this thesis, has been the conspicuous absence in the theoretical literature of Islam's role in the emergence of nations and nationalism. In this respect, scholars have tended to see Islam as having a universalizing effect on communities because of its ideal of the 'umma, the community of Muslims that transcends the nation – and other categories of communal identity and attachment – and asserts the ideal of common Islamic belief as the primary focus of community. Deriving from the ideal of the 'umma, other factors such as the existence of a common Arabic language and Islam's insistence on the centrality of Arabic to orthodox practice, are seen by scholars as having universalizing effects and which tend to be antithetical to the emergence of nations and nationalism across the Muslim world.

Seeing Islam and its assertion of the primary importance of the 'umma to Muslims as impediments to the idea of the nation, some theorists of nations and nationalism have tended to posit a theoretical tension between the particular characteristics of community the 'umma and the nation separately embrace. I have argued that this has happened largely because theorists have paid inadequate attention to the numerous empirical studies and historiographical accounts of the emergence of nationalism in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world. Indeed, the historiography on the Middle East shows that scholars of the region have long since explored and accepted the ways in which Islam made an important contribution to nationalism. Some of the literature in this respect has been highlighted in chapter 1 and 2. This thesis has highlighted the divergence between theories of nationalism and the actual historiography of nationalism in the Middle East and by employing the case study of Egypt in the years 1879-1882, this thesis has attempted to make a contribution to the theoretical debate on Islam's relationship to nationalism. In chapters 4 and 5, I explored some of the views held by Islamic thinkers on the subject of nation, 'umma and other associated concepts of community and some of the terms, criteria and defining features that they articulated and debated. My purpose here was to illustrate that according to these Islamic thinkers, Islamic conceptions of community rather than being antithetical to nationalism were in fact similar. For instance, the 'umma's emphasis on territory,

religion, history, language and historical group attachment, are all criteria and shared understandings with historical conceptions of the nation which point towards the necessity to revise and re-think some of the theoretical assumptions to the rise of nations and nationalism in the Islamic world. I conclude that while theoretical differences point towards incompatibility, conceptual analysis reveals similarities in definitions, meanings and normative understandings of the characteristics and elements of community for both the nation and ‘umma.

Middle East scholars have paid considerable attention to the rise of nationalism in the region and as mentioned above, found that Islam contributed in various ways to the emergence of this phenomenon. But in doing this, they have generally applied the assumption, across the whole of the region, that the rise of nationalism dates from the Ottoman defeat in 1918. This assumption rests on two prevailing ideas widespread within the historiography of the Middle East. The first is that the nineteenth century was an incubating period of nationalism where the ideas made their way into the region through greater contact with Europe through the Ottoman Empire and were embraced by a new educated class. Secondly, the incubation of nationalism came in the form of greater appreciation and indeed heightened consciousness around national identity and the particular characteristics and indeed uniqueness of their own particular ‘national’ group bonds, attachments and national sentiments. Despite the increased sense of national consciousness of many Ottoman Muslim ‘national’ groups, the imperial state remained the structure within which these groups expressed and articulated their own unique national identities, with the Empire representing the best form of protection for its populations from European encroachment and retaining a strong cohesive element due to the Sultan’s standing as the *de-facto* Caliph and head of the Islamic ‘umma.

While these perspectives are true to a large extent, this thesis has argued that the ‘Urabi Revolt of 1879-1882 was an exception to the pattern of the emergence of nationalism in the region. I have suggested that the ‘Urabi Revolt was an attempt by a local nationalist movement to assert its political independence from the Ottoman Empire, an important aspect of political nationalism. While asserting the right and desire for national political independence, Egyptian nationalists I note, drew the important distinction between their national political aspirations and their Islamic loyalty and

attachment to the Empire, the Ottoman Sultan and the Islamic ‘umma. Historiographical studies of Egypt have tended to view the ‘Urabi movement’s desire to remain within the Empire and the repeated assurances of loyalty it sent to the Sultan during the period where the movement was challenging and opposing the authority of the Khedive, as sufficient grounds to categorize the ‘Urabi Revolt in a similar way to other Muslim anti-Ottoman national protest movements during the nineteenth century.

In the case of Arab nationalism, scholars have viewed this movement as emerging during the course of the nineteenth century through a heightened sense of Arabism culminating in “full-blown” nationalism in the aftermath of the Empire’s collapse in the early twentieth century. Arabism, the sense in which Arabs are a unique national group was bound to ideas of Arab superiority and uniqueness, ideas associated with a sacred dimension as chosen people which placed their link to Islam above those of Muslims of non-Arab origin. This heightened sense of Arabism developed during the nineteenth century but scholars generally agree that Arabs for the overwhelming part remained loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

In broadly similar ways to Arabism, the ‘Urabi Revolt is seen by scholars as the phase of Egyptian nationalism where Egyptian national consciousness was raised to the political level, without making the ‘leap’ to political nationalism seeking its own state. According to Eric Hobsbawm, as I have pointed out in Chapter 2, political nationalism is the phase he terms “protonationalism”. I have questioned the conceptual usefulness of the term “protonationalism” and suggested that Hobsbawm’s creation of the category is meant to reconcile his modernist outlook on nationalism, where the premodern historical attachments of ethnicity are assigned a political dimension without, at this stage, adopting a statist agenda. In chapter 6 of this thesis, I offer the statement of the National Party as illustrating clearly a desire, albeit carefully worded and ordered, setting down the opposition’s desire for political independence from the Ottoman Empire. In chapter 7, I offer an equally clear political and ‘statist agenda’ where the *Majlis al-‘Urfi* assumes the role of the parliament, votes to depose the Khedive in defiance of the Ottoman Sultan and in the process undertakes to govern the country through the existing state apparatus which includes ministries, commissions, and a makeshift parliament.



The final set of conclusions I make here pertain to the Islamic dimension of the 'Urabi movement and the importance of 'ulama to the movement. It is widely accepted by Middle East scholars that Islam has made important contributions to the emergence of nationalism across the region. My thesis argues that 'ulama – seen in a broad sense as Islamic clerics, thinkers and scholars in a variety of professions – played an important role in the nationalist movement led by Ahmed 'Urabi. When beginning my research, the assumption that 'ulama would play an important role in political movements of the late nineteenth century appeared to me to be rather an obvious assumption to make. But surprisingly, I found very little literature on this issue. Scholarly interest in the 'Urabi Revolt had not explored in detail the role of the 'ulama in this movement and key texts on the 'ulama in the nineteenth century by Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot and Daniel Crecelius suggested that 'ulama political influence had steadily declined. On the 'Urabi Revolt, again two key texts stood out – those by Juan Cole and Alexander Schölch, both excellent texts with meticulous detail on the political and sociological background to the events of 1879-1882 but both not focusing attention on the 'ulama and as a result, inconclusive as to the 'ulama's role in the movement.

Scholars who had put forward the idea that 'ulama had been marginalized over the nineteenth century seemed to exaggerate their claims and scholars writing on the 'Urabi Revolt seemed somehow convinced by this line of argument hence, what appeared to me to be disinterest in the fate and role of the 'ulama. My interest in the 'ulama stems from these initial observations and my thesis aims to make a contribution to the efforts by recent scholarship in the field, to revise the ways in which we see the continuing importance of 'ulama in Muslim society.

In chapter 3, I look closely at the argument claiming 'ulama marginalization but mainly, I show how 'ulama retained important realms of power and authority despite the obvious impact on areas where reforms were successful. I concur with scholars who demonstrate the marginalization of the 'ulama on two points. The first is that many of their economic privileges were removed which impacted on their ability to act independently becoming increasingly dependent on the state and rulers for their economic wellbeing. The second point is that the new political rulers of Egypt, Muhammad 'Ali and his successors, were on the whole, dismissive of the 'ulama's

political importance that they had amassed during the Mamluk era. The House of Muhammad ‘Ali, was able over the nineteenth century, to a large extent, to restrict their access, remove them from politically influential positions and generally limit their direct political potency due to the distance they created between political institutions and processes and the ‘ulama’s ability to be included in those institutions and be influential in the processes.

But my analysis in chapter 3 looks at other important and influential realms in which ‘ulama were able to either insulate themselves from reforms or where reforms did not penetrate to the extent that we are sometimes led to believe. In particular I look at the religious realm where the evidence is far from convincing that ‘ulama were even fractionally displaced and the educational realm where I make a similar argument but accept that minor challenges to their monopoly on education provision were experienced. More difficult to judge and where the evidence is weaker is the matter of judicial reform and the ‘ulama’s role here. Given the lack of clear cut evidence, the only claim I make here is that in some respects of judicial reform, key ‘ulama may still have retained influential posts in some courts due to a continued reliance of the court system to be dispensing justice in line with Islamic norms.

Having suggested in chapter 3 the continued existence of ‘ulama influence in society through a variety of key functions, in chapter 4, I focus on three important Islamic thinkers and reformers and explore the intellectual content of their contributions to debates about nations and nationalism. The three ‘ulama together represent an important intellectual backdrop for the ‘Urabi Revolt and the analysis in this chapter illustrates some of the key debates that these ‘ulama were involved in, the influence they might have had on other ‘ulama and how the themes they tackle related to a desire to see educational reform. Tahtawi’s impact on Egyptian nationalism is hard to overestimate and it is equally hard not to concur with other scholars such as Albert Hourani who have already made this point. But it was important for this study to say something about Tahtawi’s thoughts and opinions on Egyptian nationalism and in particular the characteristics of the Egyptian nation not only because of his huge influence but also in light of my discussion of theories of nationalism in chapter 2. My argument with Tahtawi is simply that measured against even the most recent theories

of nations and nationalism, Tahtawi's views on the subject would fit very neatly within ethno-symbolist and other historically grounded theories of nationalism. My argument with 'Abduh in chapter 4 is not only to show the importance of his views and opinions which again other scholars have done, but also to show some of the underlying debates about modernization, progress, Islamic unity and authenticity which fed into his views on nationalism and his ultimate support of the 'Urabi movement. Finally, my treatment of Marsafi's work in this chapter is once again to be taken in light of my discussion on theories of nationalism in chapter 2. Most important though is my exploration of some of Marsafi's definitions and explanations against a theoretical background and how some of the terms Marsafi uses have striking similarities and lie within the conceptual boundaries of modern theories of nations and nationalism. My overall purpose in this chapter was to show how the ideas, definitions, prescriptions, problems and solutions to many of the problems these three thinkers identified, were similar to those found within the nationalist theories discussed in chapter 2 and which tell us how nations and nationalism emerge. The importance of Islamic scholars putting forward these ideas within the conceptual framework of Islamic notions of community is also significant given that many scholars of nationalism are convinced that Islam impedes the nation with its universalizing drive.

While chapter 4 looked at the Islamic intellectual background and treatment of nationalism in relation to Egypt, chapter 5 focused on 'Abduh once again and Abdallah al-Nadim. Their work, views and opinions, I argued are intellectual contributions not only to Egyptian nationalism, as with the work in chapter 4, but specifically served the purpose of providing the intellectual contribution to 'Urabi and the nationalist movement. Their journalistic writings in this crucial period were significant contributions to the nationalist movement. Chapter 6 explores some of the political positioning of the nationalist movement in relation to the Khedive, the British and the Ottoman Empire and situates 'ulama in these key political events and communications. In this chapter, I include some discussion of other 'ulama who either supported or rejected the nationalist movement and argue that in the nationalist political struggle against the Ottoman Empire, the Khedive and the European powers, 'ulama became a crucial constituency for the nationalist movement with 'Urabi often relying on the 'ulama to fulfill important political or politically motivated functions. My argument

here is to illustrate that the 'ulama were a heterogeneous group with mixed and varied views and opinions and which the nationalist movement wished to coopt for its own political purpose. Through this view of the 'ulama, I conclude that far from being politically marginal, the 'ulama were a crucial political ally for 'Urabi and the nationalists. Continuing in a chronological sense but also trying to illustrate 'ulama involvement in the nationalist events, chapter 7 highlighted 'ulama involvement in terms of support and rejection of the deposition of the Khedive. Again this was a crucial event in the nationalist movement and I concluded that 'ulama involvement was high but importantly on both sides where elite 'ulama both supported and rejected the moves. Chapters 6 and 7 argued two main points. First that 'ulama involvement in the political events from 1880 to the collapse of the nationalist movement in 1882 was high but importantly, I tried to illustrate a broad view of 'ulama opinion taking into account those that supported and also those who rejected the movement. The debates between contending 'ulama about Egypt's relationship with the Ottoman Empire, their views on European encroachment and British invasion, with the rule and authority of the Khedive and 'ulama views of their own national past and future aspirations were important aspects of the nationalist and anti-nationalist perspectives. Their views at the time reveal how some 'ulama embraced the idea of an Islamic Egyptian nation at ease with its political and national independence, seeing this as a vital feature of a stronger more 'authentically Islamic' 'umma, while others, found in nationalism and an assertion of Egyptian national sentiment, the beginnings of the destruction of Islamic unity. This thesis has sought to engage with these rich and powerful debates which remain relevant today.

It is not uncommon among my peer group of researchers that in the process of carrying out our research, many more questions than we initially envisaged are unearthed and by the end of our projects, remain unanswered. Here I offer some areas of future research which require the attention of scholars to undertake further research.

In the first instance, on the ‘Urabi Revolt, there exists two main authoritative accounts of the event. Juan Cole, in his *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East*<sup>1</sup>, has examined in depth the social dimensions of the Revolution but in doing so, his analysis looked more at the reasons for the emergence of the Revolt at the expense of providing a detailed picture of what role groups like the ‘ulama played in the actual events and political trajectory of the movement. Similarly, in Alexander Schölch’s *Egypt for the Egyptians!*<sup>2</sup>, the attention of the book is weighted towards analyzing the micro-political dimensions of the years 1878 to 1882 without paying adequate attention to the socio-cultural aspects of the revolt itself. Both works make a major contribution to the understanding of the ‘Urabi Revolt illustrating the importance of the event and paving the way for other scholars to take up a variety themes and issues which deserve more attention. But so far, this has not been done and with these books having been published over 20 years ago, the ‘Urabi Revolt and the events surrounding it remain vastly under-researched.

The sparse literature on the Revolt is all the more surprising as the archives for this period of Egyptian history remain vast and largely untapped. Cole and Schölch both make use of the archives but in conducting my own fieldwork, it was evident that much more material was available for researchers who want to focus on particular class or social groups of the period to ascertain their particular roles in the ‘Urabi Revolt or to conduct research on the social history of the period. In chapter 1 of this thesis, I explained my reasons for focusing on elite ‘ulama and the ways in which my initial research planned to take a much broader geographical and class cross-section of ‘ulama opinion and views on the emergence of Egyptian nationalism. Because of a number of practical and time constraints this was not possible but the need remains not only to explore more the opinions and views of ‘elite’ ‘ulama but also to find ways in which to better understand the ‘ulama networks outside of Cairo and the main urban

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt’s ‘Urabi Movement*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Schölch, *Egypt for the Egyptians! The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878–1882*, London Ithaca Press, 1981

centers. Meir Hatina's<sup>3</sup> recent study on the 'ulama and their political role while contributing significantly to our understanding of their active participation in the 'Urabi Revolt is at the same time, more longitudinal and stretches into the middle of the twentieth century and points towards the need for further research in this area and also to bring to bear more comparative studies of the 'ulama in other Muslim states.

Another important area for further research is to look at the sufi networks, which were vast, powerful and which incorporated urban guilds and were equally connected to rural communities. In Chapter 3, I pointed towards the rural networks of the elite 'ulama which were deeply entrenched but far more research is needed in discovering and uncovering the extent of these. F. De Jong's<sup>4</sup> in-depth study of the sufi orders of the nineteenth century has been unsurpassed in the 35 years since it was published which points towards the need to reassess his findings in light of new research and increased accessibility of the archives.

Chapter 3 in this thesis broadly looked at the process of modernization in Egypt during the nineteenth century and focused mainly on education reform efforts. My argument in this chapter was that nineteenth century reform may not have had the effect of marginalization on the 'ulama that modernization theorists looking at the Egyptian 'ulama in the nineteenth century have previously suggested. The insulation of the traditional spheres of 'ulama authority from state encroachment and the reluctance of the political authorities to attempt comprehensive and universal reform policies, I argued left the 'ulama largely intact in the mosques, religious schools and to a lesser extent in the courts. The impact and extent of educational reform in this period and the position of the 'ulama in society remains dependent on a number of authoritative works including J. Heyworth-Dunne's<sup>5</sup> *History of Education in the Nineteenth*

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<sup>3</sup> Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', Politics and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*, Salt Lake City, UT, University of Utah Press, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Frederick De Jong, *Turuq and Turuq-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt, A Historical Study in Organizational Dimensions of Islamic Mysticism*, Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1978

<sup>5</sup> J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, London, Cass, 1968

Century and to a lesser extent, Edward Lane's<sup>6</sup> account of his time in Egypt between 1825 and 1849. While these works remain invaluable, scholars such as Indira Falk Gesink<sup>7</sup> have begun to look at educational reform in al-Azhar over the nineteenth century through the prism of conservative clerics such as Sheikh Muhammad 'Illaish to better understand the conservative view of reform. Gesink's work is important for my own work as it shows that the support shown to 'Urabi and the nationalist movement was not just forthcoming from reformist or modernist 'ulama but that conservative 'ulama were equally supportive of nationalism while at the same time they opposed education reform. This reassessment of the conservative view to show the complexity of debate on such an emotive and important issue is necessary.

If there are significant opportunities for future empirical research, the need to develop a more comprehensive body of theoretical literature on religion and nationalism and particularly on Islam and nationalism is also required. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, John Hutchinson<sup>8</sup> and Montserrat Guibernau pointed towards the necessity for scholars of nations and nationalism to explore in greater detail the relationship between religion and nationalism which they noted was greatly under-researched. Peter van der Veer<sup>9</sup> and Rogers Brubaker<sup>10</sup>, two scholars cited in this thesis have made significant contributions in addressing this deficiency in the theoretical literature on religion and nationalism but while their interventions are timely and important, more research in this area is required.

Finally, the tumultuous events around the Arab world over the last three years under the hugely optimistic title of the "Arab Spring" has brought into sharp focus Islam's relationship to politics and its continued importance to Muslim societies in the Middle

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London, Dent

<sup>7</sup> I. F. Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (eds), *Understanding Nationalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2001

<sup>9</sup> Peter van der Veer, 'Nationalism and Religion' in John Breuilly (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013

<sup>10</sup> Rogers Brubaker, 'Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 19:1, 2013

East and the wider Muslim world. ‘Urabi’s nationalist revolution attempted to arrest control of Egypt from rulers that they claimed were unjust and illegitimate. These same calls were heard recently on the streets of Tunis, Cairo and Tripoli and continue to be heard in Damascus and many other capitals and towns and cities across the region over one hundred and thirty years after the ‘Urabi Revolt. It is striking that in the same way that ‘Urabi’s nationalist movement claimed to be the true defenders of the nation and of Islam, Arab regimes have, and continue to make very similar claims. Interestingly, both moderate Islamists and Arab and Islamic regimes show no eagerness for a united *‘umma* under a single Caliph in much the same way as ‘Urabi and his nationalists rejected the Ottoman Sultan in the end. The feature that remains consistent in the politics of 1882 and of 2014 around the Muslim world, is the same desire to ‘nationalize’ Islam, to monopolize its appeal and to link it to national regeneration and renewal. Such a robust and enduring combination of ideology and religion requires greater comprehension.



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